

Power and Politics
in Tenth-Century
CHINA

The Former Shu Regime

HONGJIE WANG

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HONGJIE WANG



**C A M B R I A
P R E S S**

Amherst, New York

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To my mentor, Professor Richard L. Davis

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CHRONOLOGY

Reigns of Late Tang Emperors, 873–907

Emperor	Reigned	Reign titles		
Xizong僖宗 (862–888)	873–888	Qianfu	乾符	874–879
		Guangming	廣明	880
		Zhonghe	中和	881–884
		Guangqi	光啟	885–887
		Wende	文德	888
Zhaozong昭宗 (867–904)	888–904	Longji	龍紀	889
		Dashun	大順	890–891
		Jingfu	景福	892–893
		Qianning	乾寧	894–897
		Guanghua	光化	898–900
		Tianfu	天復	901–903
Aidi哀帝 (892–908)	904–907			
		Tianyou	天佑	904–907

Reigns of Former Shu Rulers, 891–925

Ruler	Reigned	Reign titles		
Wang Jian王建 (847–918) (Governor of West Chuan) (King of Shu) (Emperor)	891–918			
		Wucheng	武成	908–910
		Yongping	永平	911–915
		Tongzheng	通正	916
		Tianhan	天漢	917*
		Guangtian	光天	918
Wang Yan王衍 (901–926)	918–925			
		Qiande	乾德	919–924
		Xiankang	咸康	925

* The state title was changed to “Great Han” and changed back to “Great Shu” the next year.

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INTRODUCTION

WE LAMENT. After the decline of Tang rule, bandits across the world with tattooed faces and shaved heads exploited conditions to assume the costumes and trappings of royals. ...Through a century of contests among men of valor, mountains and rivers were sealed so tight that neither wind nor air could pass. There is a saying: "When a fresh wind arises, perpetrators of darkness will submit; when the sun and moon come out, torches will be extinguished." As a great man does his deeds, harmony overtakes the world.

—Ouyang Xiu 歐陽修 (1007–1072),
Xin Wudai shi 新五代史¹

Political turbulence was common in times of dynastic transition in imperial China. Multiple regional regimes arose frequently on the lands of the former unified empire, vying for political and military supremacy until a dominant power emerged and achieved reunification. The age of political fragmentation during the tenth century, known as the Five Dynasties and Ten States period, or simply the Five Dynasties period,

(Wudai shiguo 五代十國, 907–979), was doubtlessly typical of such times. From the crumbling of the Tang 唐 empire (618–907) to the next reunification of China proper under the Northern Song 北宋 dynasty (960–1127), five short-lived dynasties succeeded one another in the Central Plains (Zhongyuan 中原), the old political heartland in North China, while about one dozen smaller autonomous regimes occupied the rest of the country (though not concurrently), mostly in the south.² Lasting more than half a century, the period is thought to have been one of unique political intrigue, martial bravery, and romance, in which founding rulers of humble origins engaged in schemes and strategies that increasingly inspire popular interest today.³ Not surprisingly for a significant portion of the Tang–Song transition, this period of political upheaval has recently attracted attention from modern scholars.⁴ This book explores the complicated national politics and intricate interstate relations of the early tenth century with a focus on the Former Shu 前蜀 (891–925), one of the “Ten States” that contributed significantly to the formation of the unique political configuration of the day.

Interest in the political history of the Five Dynasties and Ten States period can be traced back to the late tenth century, when the Song dynasty had consolidated its central authority over China proper. With few exceptions, the period as a whole was depicted as a notorious “age of tumult” (*luanshi* 亂世) by Song historians, who, obviously influenced by the traditional view that valued the “great unity” (*da yitong* 大一統) over political division, had enough reasons to condemn the chaotic Five Dynasties period and glorify the historical feat of the Song reunification.⁵ By contrasting the divided Five Dynasties with the “unified” Song, they intended to justify the latter’s ascendancy in the political chaos of the tenth century and strengthen the idea that the new government had received the Mandate of Heaven and legitimately ruled China.

But, interestingly, this strategy of morally distancing Song from the tenth-century regimes was practiced concurrently with another strategy in which the Song historians, either overtly or implicitly, emphasized the political continuity between Song and the five northern dynasties. Understandably for a power that emanated from the Later Zhou 後周

(951–960), the last of the five dynasties in the Central Plains, the Northern Song was seen as its inevitable political successor. The founding emperors of the Song dynasty, Taizu 太祖 (r. 960–976) and Taizong 太宗 (r. 976–997), originally served the former dynasty as commanders before seizing power from the child emperor of Zhou in 960.⁶ At that time, several independent regimes still occupied the rest of China and the last of them was not eliminated by the Song until 979. Thus, the Song actually played two different roles before China's reunification: inheritor of the Later Zhou in the north and conqueror of other powers across China. This historical background resulted in a distinct division of the former polities in Song historical writing between the northern dynasties from whom the Song itself originated and all the other regional polities, most of which fell under the category of “Ten States.”

Along with this dynasties-states division was a sharply different treatment of tenth-century polities in the Song historiography for the period. In general, the five northern dynasties were usually dubbed the “central” powers that dominated national politics and ultimately led China along the path to the Song reunification. In contrast, other regimes, especially those in the south, were treated as subordinate or secondary powers, all considered “illegitimate” (*wei* 偽) and incapable of ever challenging the north politically or militarily. For example, Sima Guang 司馬光 (1019–1086) and his colleagues directly adopted the reign titles of the five northern dynasties as time markers in the chronicles of the period in the *Comprehensive Mirror for Aid in Government* (*Zizhi tongjian* 資治通鑒).⁷ The *Old History of the Five Dynasties* (*Jiu Wudai shi* 舊五代史), an official history compiled in 974 by Song courtiers, put the histories of the rulers of the dynasties into the “Basic Annals” (*benji* 本紀), a conventional category in traditional Chinese historiography designed specifically for “monarchs,” but grouped all other regimes into the chapters entitled “Usurpation and Illegitimacy” (*jianwei* 僭偽) or “Hereditary Houses” (*shixi* 世襲), depending on whether pretenders assumed royal titles or accepted the nominal sovereignty of the north.⁸ Even Ouyang Xiu, the famous Confucian historian known for his radical antipathy toward the period in his *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties* (*Wudai*

shiji 五代史記, known later as the *New History of Five Dynasties*, or *Xin Wudai shi*), adopted the same discrimination to polarize the polities into two hierarchical categories, “Basic Annals” for the northern dynasties and “Hereditary Houses” (*shijia* 世家) for the so-called “Ten States,” using nomenclature borrowed from Sima Qian 司馬遷 (145–87? BCE), the earliest of China’s official historians.⁹ The same treatment is found in some unofficial historical records of the Song dynasty, such as the *Stories of the Five States* (*Wuguo gushi* 五國故事), which uniformly identified the southern states as “*wei*.”¹⁰ Compared to those “illegitimate” southern states, even the controversial Later Liang 後梁 (907–923), the first of the northern dynasties, which Song historians vehemently condemned for its founding emperor’s brutality and usurpation, was practically treated as legitimate by most of the early Song writings.¹¹ In this dominant narrative, the five northern dynasties obtained their *de facto* positions in the line of “orthodox succession” (*zhengtong* 正統), an influential idea for political legitimacy in traditional Chinese historiography, while other powers, no matter how independent and powerful in reality, were denigrated as petty regimes deserving conquest by the unifying force from the north.¹²

This binary grouping and its discriminatory interpretation, though not unchallenged since the Northern Song,¹³ fundamentally shaped later generations’ perceptions of the regimes and the national politics of the Five Dynasties period. Even today, compared to the study of the political history of the five northern dynasties, the neglect of the “very real kingdoms” of other parts of China is obvious in modern scholarship, especially in Western-language publications.¹⁴ Influenced by this same Song perspective, another imbalance in the writings on the tenth century is also quite observable: scholars have paid far more attention to the later period preceding the founding of the Song than to the early stage that connected the Five Dynasties to the Tang.¹⁵ Their “greatest concern has been to explain how we get to the Song rather than how we get *from* the Tang,” as one scholar noted incisively.¹⁶ Clearly, in this approach the Song reunification is seen as an inevitable historical trend, just as the unequal status of the “Five Dynasties” and “Ten States” is taken to be

a natural historical reality. Such an influential hierarchical paradigm for the understanding of tenth-century China is highly problematic. Imposing a master narrative, this paradigm imagines the existence of a linear history, from the Tang through the Five Dynasties and down to the Song, and thus simply posits a teleological path to the Song reunification. In this narrative, an “inevitable” continuity emerges which naturally exaggerates the predominance of the northern dynasties over other regimes and denies any other possibility of historical development. As a result, the assumed line of orthodoxy in North China could easily blind us to the rhetorical strategies that Song historians used to contain the representation of other regimes and to forestall any other perception of the Tang–Five Dynasties–Song transition.

There is no doubt that this Song representation of the dynasties-states pattern politics needs to be reevaluated in order to rethink national politics, the reality of interstate relations, and the mentality of contemporary people in perceiving the upheavals and changes of tenth-century China. Such a reinterpretation of this era must shed more light in particular on the early stage of the Five Dynasties, in which there might have existed alternative political patterns different from those that tend to Song reunification and thus tell a different story about the political realities of the day. In order to do so, the focus needs to shift to the long-overlooked powers outside the Central Plains, and one needs to examine not only their individual developments in varied situations in this multistate China but also their creative interactions with one another and with the allegedly “central” northern dynasties. This book selects the Former Shu as a case study for the political environment of the early tenth century, in which a southern state grew out of the chaos surrounding the Tang’s end and maneuvered to survive by interacting strategically with its neighboring powers. By exploring the Shu’s military strategies and diplomatic contacts with other regimes in particular, especially with the Later Liang and Later Tang 後唐 (923–936), the earliest of the ostensibly “dominant” and “legitimate” dynasties to rule North China during the period, I hope to define a different political configuration of tenth-century China that is characterized by balance of power and pragmatic coexistence among the

“dynasties” and “states,” which in most cases sensibly chose to “share” the mandate and should be treated equally as “regional regimes.”

DYNASTIES, STATES OR REGIONAL REGIMES

The Song historians’ perception of tenth-century regimes is a hierarchical one, which, based on their need to legitimize the origin of the Song, bestows “central” and “legitimate” status on the northern dynasties but underrates the significance of other polities. This discriminatory vision finds its expression in the usage of the deceptive term, “*Wudai shiguo*.” While the word “*dai*” or “*chaodai* 朝代” is used in Chinese historiography to separate one ruling house from its immediate predecessor and successor, the name “*guo*” is applied with few exceptions to small, short-lived regional polities, such as the “*Shiliu guo* 十六國” (Sixteen Kingdoms, 304–439), apparently following the custom in the Zhou 周 dynasty (ca.1046–256 BCE), which used the term for scattered vassal states.¹⁷ Thus, the molding of the two categories in the early Song to group the tenth-century regimes must have borne the bias of the Song people from its very beginning.¹⁸ Since Ouyang Xiu first introduced the term “*Wudai shiguo*,” it has been widely adopted as the name of the era of historical transition from Tang to Song.¹⁹ But as pointed out earlier, the discrimination underlying this term should serve to remind us of the danger of adopting it as an essential explanatory or descriptive category in our study of the political history of this period, for it misrepresents the historical reality of tenth-century politics, the interstate relationships in particular, and overlooks other political components. I would argue that there did not exist a clear-cut division or hierarchy between the northern dynasties and the other polities, especially during the early Five Dynasties, when some powerful non-Central-Plain polities successfully challenged the “central” dynasties and were recognized by the latter as equals. Although the polities of the day possessed varied territories, military strengths, and political pursuits, none of them had become a dominant enough power to be a unifying force. Thus it is better to treat both the “dynasties” and the “states” as merely “regional regimes.”

MAP 1. Regional regimes during the early Five Dynasties, ca. 912.

A brief examination of the political transition of the period will give us a sense of the historical situation of these regional regimes. In North China, when the ruler of the Later Liang, Zhu Wen 朱溫 (Zhu Quanzhong 朱全忠, 852–912, r. 907–912), claimed to be an emperor in 907, he immediately faced challenges from powerful rivals such as the Jin 晉 (882–923), the Wu 吳 (892–937), and the Former Shu. When the Later

Tang replaced the Liang and expanded to a larger territory, the real political division in most of China, especially in the south, never changed. Although the ambitious founding emperor, Zhuangzong 莊宗 (Li Cunxu 李存勗, 885–926, r. 923–926), achieved nominal unification in North China and even briefly occupied Shu, his dream of true unification soon proved unrealistic and only brought his reign to a swift end. His successor, though achieving some successes in reestablishing the “central” authority in the north, had to shift to a more practical policy in dealing with quasi-independent border provinces and rivals of equal power in the south, concentrating his administrative and economic base in Henan 河南 and Hedong 河東, two central provinces in the north.²⁰ The next northern regime, the Later Jin 後晉 (936–946), was relatively weak and faced formidable challenges, not only from other Chinese powers from the south but also from one-time allies to the north, the Kitan 契丹 (later known as the Liao 遼, 907–1125). The situation changed little under the Later Han 後漢 (947–950), a very short-lived regime that was founded after the Kitan (Liao) destroyed the Later Jin. It seems that a unifying force first emerged with the founding of the Later Zhou 後周 (951–960), which annexed some lands of its southern neighbors and pursued an increasingly ambitious political goal of reunification.²¹ But Later Zhou hegemony was not universally recognized by contemporary rivals, especially some southern imperial regimes, which strove to maintain the original political balance and their own independence. Even when the Northern Song succeeded the Zhou in 960 and began its unification effort, the final transformation of the Song from a “regional” power in North China to a unified imperial empire governing the entirety of China proper did not formally and finally emerged until some years later.²² To be fair, “it is reasonable to consider the period before the Jianlong era (960–963) of Song as a sort of ‘warring states’” (建隆以前謂之戰國焉允矣), as the Qing 清 (1644–1911) historian Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 (1619–1692) commented. And in this multistate environment, he continued, “none of the rulers deserved to become the Son of Heaven” (皆不足以為天子).²³

In fact, all of the so-called “Ten States” were just as autonomous as their northern counterparts. Of course, with different geographical

locations and greatly varied political, military, and economic resources, different polities developed different survival strategies that defined their ways of ruling within their domains and interacting with rivals. Some powerful regimes, such as the Wu, the Southern Tang 南唐 (937–976), and the Former and Later Shu 後蜀 (934–965), assumed imperial titles and at times achieved equality with the northern dynasties both in rhetoric and in reality. Some regimes like the Min 閩 (896–945) and the Southern Han 南漢 (905–971) located in the remote southeastern coast frequently ignored orders from the Central Plains or other political “centers” and even established imperial authorities of their own. Several other regimes, such as the Wu Yue 吳越 (893–978), Jingnan 荊南 (907–963), and Chu 楚 (896–951), preferred to nominally accept the sovereignty of the northern dynasties to counterbalance their hostile neighboring states, but this pragmatic strategy and their lip service to one or multiple regimes never weakened their *de facto* autonomies, which were recognized by their contemporaries.²⁴ Even Ouyang Xiu had to admit that “none of the ‘Ten States’ belonged to the Central-Plain dynasties” (十國皆非中國所有也).²⁵

The traditional dynasties-states division, especially the problematic category “Wudai shiguo,” presents another difficulty. It fails to acknowledge other polities that were neither politically inferior to nor militarily weaker than most of the other regional regimes, especially some of the “Ten States.” For example, it does not reflect the power dynamics of the early tenth century, when the Later Liang was confronted by the Jin, the political predecessor of the Later Tang. The Qi 岐 (887–930) in the northwest and the Yan 燕 (895–913) in the northern area of Hebei 河北 are not included either, though both had contributed to the political transition in North China during the first two decades of the period to a significant extent.²⁶ A similar omission is found with respect to some other regional polities, mostly in the north, which—though nominally recognizing the sovereignty of the northern dynasties—maintained independence for a while and played important roles in the Liang–Tang transition.²⁷ Upon examining tenth-century China in a broader geopolitical context, some non-Chinese powers surrounding China proper during

the period, epitomized by the Kitan (Liao), also powerfully shaped the politics of the day.²⁸ In contrast, Jingnan, one of the “Ten States,” was much smaller and weaker, and its rulers never claimed to be emperors as did those of some the independent northern powers mentioned above.²⁹ Obviously, the criteria for the classification of the “states,” even in the writings of Song historians, were neither consistent nor convincing; they cannot explain why some regimes should be regarded as “*guo*” but the others should not.³⁰ Unfortunately, the Song categorization of the tenth-century polities has continued to be used by most later historians.³¹ Just as Qing historian Wu Renchen 吳任臣 (?–1689) once defended his adherence to the Song category in the preface to his famous work, *Spring and Autumn of the Ten States* (*Shiguo chunqiu* 十國春秋), “Historians usually abide by the earlier writings and follow the old pattern of the ‘Hereditary Houses of the Ten States’” (蓋史從前文，亦仍十國世家之舊雲耳).³²

Clearly, the traditional dynasties-centered paradigm and the old category of “Wudai shiguo” serve to downplay the role of the non-Central-Plain powers and provide an imprecise description of the political changes and interstate relations of the day. Without considering the southern states and those ignored “regional regimes,” one cannot explain the complex power relations involved nor gain a holistic picture of the Five Dynasties period, especially its early days, in which the national politics involved political forces outside the group of the “Wudai shiguo.” By adopting the term “regional regimes” in this work, I hope to transcend the unfairly fixed boundaries of “dynasties” and “states” set by the dominant Song narrative and reevaluate the significance of some historiographically marginalized powers in shaping the national politics of the tenth century, without overlooking the great variation among the regimes of the time. Thus, in this work the term “regional regime” will apply to all of the autonomous powers that exercised reasonably effective control over domains with relatively stable boundaries for an observable time period, such as the Qi, with which the Former Shu dealt from the 890s to the 920s. I suggest that a widely maintained balance of power existed across China for most of the Five Dynasties period,

in which most regional regimes preferred to use pragmatic strategies in dealing with their surrounding rivals, with whom they could coexist and even “share” the Mandate of Heaven.

SHARING THE MANDATE: POWER BALANCE AND PRAGMATISM IN TENTH-CENTURY CHINA

When China proper went through periods of political division, war and diplomacy constituted the main themes of interstate relations in a multi-state environment in which various polities occasionally dealt with each other on an equal footing. As early as the Eastern Zhou 東周 (770–256 BCE) period, when the central authority of the Zhou kings declined, many vassal states contended for hegemony and developed multi-form interstate relations by exchanging envoys and signing bilateral or multilateral treaties. During the Southern and Northern Dynasties period 南北朝 (420–589), the Chinese courts to the south of Yangzi River and the non-Chinese powers in the north maintained diplomatic relations despite frequent military conflicts. Even under some unified empires, such as the Han 漢 (202 BCE–220 CE) and Tang, Chinese governments had to conduct “equal” relations with their foreign neighbors during times of weakness.³³ The Five Dynasties and Ten States period surely resembled those previous times, but manifested distinctive characteristics of its own era. As the Tang dynasty broke down, a plethora of regional leaders, all of whom were former governors of Tang, started to pursue their own political goals, some claiming to be emperors and seeking to inherit what they perceived as the grand imperial heritage of the Tang. Intense competition and warfare were inevitable among those contenders. In most cases, however, especially in the first half of the tenth century, potentates of regional regimes wanted to maintain the contemporary balance of power in which no single power possessed the strength to conquer the others, and thus adopted practical strategies in dealing with neighbors to pursue their self-interests. Among those claiming royal status, grand imperial pursuits and legitimation efforts within their own domains did not prevent a practical recognition of similar claims by others and a willingness

to coexist as “emperor” and share the Mandate of Heaven bequeathed by the former Tang.

A “balance of power system” was widely distributed and constituted one of the defining characteristics of the geopolitics in most parts of China during the first half of the tenth century, when there did not exist a dominant power capable of unifying China.³⁴ In the early period, the long lasting confrontation between the Later Liang, based in Henan, and the Jin, based in Shanxi, played a crucial part in shaping contemporary power relations in North China, which not only involved smaller regimes in Hebei and northwestern China but also provided an advantageous environment for the survival of some southern regimes. The Former Shu, the subject of this study, took advantage of the situation to forge a balance in the southeast between itself and three of its neighbors, the Qi, Liang, and Jingnan. A similar balance of power existed in southeastern China around the same time between the Liang, Wu, Chu, Min, and Wu Yue, and continued to function even after the Liang and Wu were replaced by their successors.³⁵ Even in the late Five Dynasties, when the Later Zhou emerged as an unchallengeable power in China proper and seized the Huainan 淮南 region from the Southern Tang, a temporary balance between the two powers was still observable along the Yangzi River, their new boundary line.³⁶ If the regional regimes are placed in a larger geographic context, a grand balance of power can also be observed between the Kitan (Liao) and the Central-Plain dynasties, and between each of the latter and all its contemporary southern rivals as a whole. In these circumstances, despite the varied strengths of individual regimes, each power periodically constituted a more or less indispensable part of the system of balance on either the national or regional scale. A change in the situation, such as a military conquest or a shift of political alliance, would alter the system and consequently bring serious changes through a series of chain reactions.

Under the balance of power of the Five Dynasties, most regional regimes adopted markedly practical strategies in dealing with different political rivals based on a careful calculation of their own strengths and surrounding power dynamics. Taking self-preservation as their primary

goal, each greatly valued pragmatism in its military and diplomatic interactions with others to maintain the balance of power around them. For example, the Wu Yue, which enjoyed the longest duration in the Five Dynasties period, designed an effective strategy for survival by giving up its independent imperial pursuit and accepting the sovereignty of a succession of northern dynasties, which it used to counterbalance the threat of its hostile neighbors.³⁷ The same strategy was employed by the smallest “state,” Jingnan, which survived autonomously before being incorporated by the Song in 963. Straddling the sensitive middle Yangzi area, Jingnan was usually seen as a buffer region by the neighboring southern powers, which preferred to spare it than risk direct confrontation with the northern dynasties.³⁸ Another good example is the Southern Tang under Li Bian 李昇 (r. 937–943), who refused to take advantage of a disastrous fire that inflicted heavy losses on the Wu Yue, one of his enemies to the south of Yangzi.³⁹

Pragmatism shaped by the balance of power also informed the relations between regimes with imperial status. Obviously, no regime was confident enough to believe that it had a monopoly on the mandate to rule. Thus one observes a remarkable divergence between their imperial claims in rhetoric and pragmatic interstate policies. On the one hand, the rulers of those states made great efforts within their domains to pursue royal titles and legitimize their imperial claims, endeavoring to justify their position as the “orthodox successor” to the Tang.⁴⁰ But on the other hand, in dealing with other regimes they usually did not stick to the same imperial ideal but adopted more flexible policies and displayed a more conservative character. For example, the Later Tang under the reign of Mingzong 明宗 (Li Siyuan 李嗣源, 867–933, r. 926–933), extended considerable respect to the Wu Yue, one of its nominally dependent states in the south, even allowing its “imperial” envoy to perform a court protocol in an audience with the Wu Yue’s ruler, Qian Liu 錢鏐 (852–932).⁴¹ Such a pragmatic attitude can also be observed in the diplomatic exchanges between two powers that both claimed royal titles. When the Later Tang, under Zhuangzong, conquered the Liang and subsequently received congratulatory legates from southern states, those of the Former Shu, Wu,

and Southern Han presented letters of credence that bore the rhetoric of political equality. Notably, Zhuangzong, though having overtly claimed supremacy in China, accepted them without obvious rebuke.⁴² In the case of the powerful Later Zhou in the late 950s, the emperor Shizong 世宗 (Chai Rong 柴榮, 921–959, r. 954–959) maintained a realistic attitude toward the south even after defeating the Southern Tang in Huainan. When a military governor in what is now Fujian province voluntarily offered his submission to the Zhou, Shizong turned him down, claiming that he had to abide by the treaty between the Zhou and the Southern Tang and could not interfere in southern politics.⁴³

Of course, such a pragmatic strategy for dealing with interstate relations was not universally carried out by all the rulers of the day. Some ambitious rulers did not hesitate to adopt expansionist policies, especially when rival states suffered internal strife. For example, Li Jing 李璟 (r. 943–961) of the Southern Tang adopted a more aggressive policy in dealing with neighbors, sending troops to occupy Min and Chu in 945 and 951, respectively, while the two regimes were in serious internal power struggles.⁴⁴ There were also occasions on which a ruler—preferring to maintain the balance of power—would not persist in taking the same strategy during his reign and would instead alter his policy to adapt to the changing situation. This can be clearly seen in Zhuangzong's changing attitude toward the Former Shu, which will be discussed later in this study. But it should be pointed out that while the expansionist behavior of those rulers might have temporarily changed the geopolitics of the regions involved, it did not prevent the formation of a similar balance of power in which some new regimes continued the pragmatic interstate strategies.⁴⁵ Actually, the balance of power in China proper established from the wreckage of the Tang seemed to have been sustained until the late Five Dynasties. The prolonged absence of a dominant power, the prompt filling of the vacuum left by defeated powers, and, more importantly, the deliberate efforts of the regional regimes to maintain the balance, all accounted for the lasting existence of the power-balance system. Indeed, the balance of power was not only a historical reality of tenth-century China but also an important basis on which regional

regimes designed their survival strategies as well as a compelling political condition prescribing their behaviors and destinies.

Clearly, the rulers of the tenth century, including those who had claimed to be emperors, soberly acknowledged the gap between rhetoric and reality, and chose to tolerate the disparity between their glorious imperial claims and limited authority in confined domains. This pragmatic attitude in dealing with interstate relations was more observable in the first half of the tenth century before any potentially unifying forces emerged. As will be discussed in this book, Wang Jian 王建 (847–918, r. 907–918), the founder of the Former Shu, was not only incapable of but also utterly disinterested in, the heroic mission of “making the world one.” By developing a formidable military force to defend his “empire” and maintaining diplomatic relations with neighbors, he successfully challenged the most powerful regimes of his day and became one of the emperors who pragmatically shared Heaven’s Mandate with others in post-Tang China.

TANG INFLUENCE, MILITARY POWER AND THE FORMER SHU

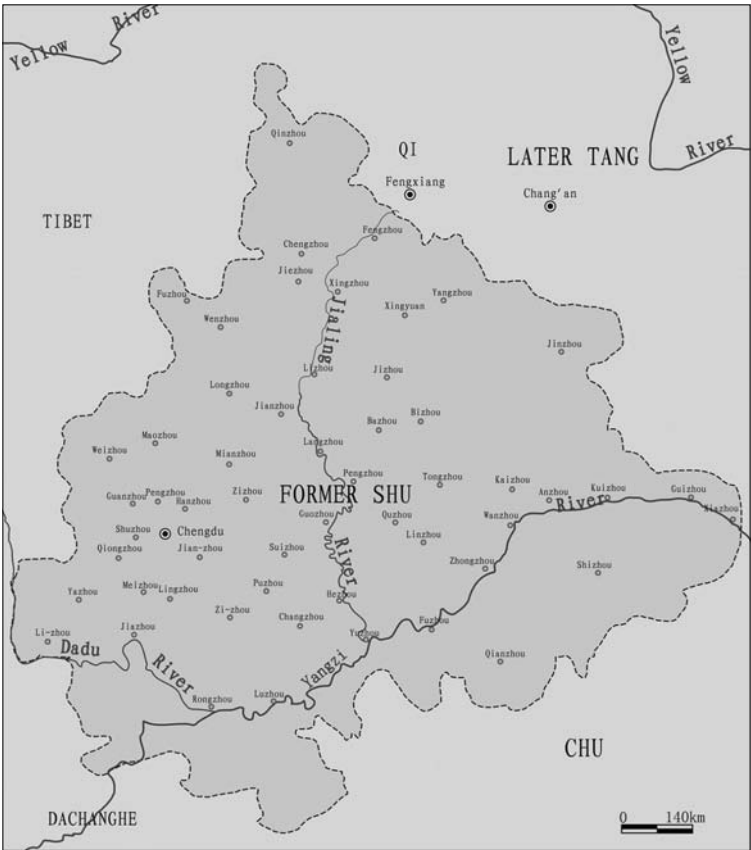
Besides balance of power and pragmatism, a study of the regional regimes of the early Five Dynasties reveals additional issues that also contributed to the formation of the unique characteristics of tenth-century politics. Among the most important are the legacy of the Tang dynasty and the significance of the military; both constitute major themes of this book.

Built on the foundation of the military commands of the Tang, the regional regimes of the early Five Dynasties inevitably possessed the distinct imprint of the former empire. Such influence influenced the formation and political institutions of the polities of the day to a great extent. Before 907, the year that marks the nominal end of the Tang, regional polities had developed their own governmental institutions on the basis of the original Tang provincial system for years.⁴⁶ As Denis Twitchett observed, each “had an independent administrative tradition, and these diverse systems had emerged from the variety of forms of government which had grown up in the same areas in late T’ang

times.”⁴⁷ More commonly, regional regimes of the day simply created miniature “empires,” designating their former provincial offices palaces, and transforming their provincial administrative structures into imperial organizations.⁴⁸

The political origins as former Tang military governors that early tenth-century rulers shared fundamentally shaped their state policies, interstate relations, political ambitions, and perceptions of the post-Tang

MAP 2. The Former Shu, ca. 924.



world. The glory of the past Tang dynasty, especially its foregone central authority, still inspired the rulers of Five Dynasties for their own purposes. Remarkably, most of them insisted on proclaiming their “loyalty” to the past Tang court, attempting to utilize the Tang cause to legitimize their own authority within their limited domains and to place themselves in more righteous positions when contending with rivals. Even the idea of Tang unity, though remembered as a bygone reality, was still cited frequently in the imperial rhetoric of some regional “empires” for the same purpose of legitimation. Thus, in the shadow of the Tang, the rulers of the tenth century, especially self-proclaimed emperors, had to wrest meaning from the conflict between what was and what should have been to create a new world that creatively reconciled the past with the present. This Tang influence on the Former Shu can be found in the historical background of the Shu region, covered in chapter 1; the rise of Wang Jian from a lower-ranking officer in the Tang army to a military governor in the late ninth century, illustrated in chapter 2; and his efforts to legitimize his imperial dominance in Shu discussed in chapter 5.

In a turbulent era like the Five Dynasties, in which multiple regimes founded by martial men competed fiercely with one another, the military constituted at least one ultimate basis of power. Without exception, all of the founding rulers of the regional regimes in the tenth century rose to power by military means, either as soldiers in official armies of the Tang or as members of successful gangs.⁴⁹ An indispensable element in the formation and existence of a regional regime, military power not only decided whether a polity could survive the fierce annexations by warlords in the last years of the Tang but also functioned to create and maintain (or shatter) the balance of power on which the regime depended to coexist with its rivals. Obviously, only by building an effective army to defend its borders could a regime gain advantage of dealing with its neighbors in a more flexible way. The sword was, of course, not the only means adopted by the rulers of the day, who were even keener to employ diplomatic tactics to maintain balanced power relations and maximize profit. In this work, the significance of the military in the founding of the Former Shu and its successes in dealing with neighboring rivals is

examined in chapters 2 to 4. And I examine in detail Wang Jian's skillful mixture of military and diplomatic tactics based on his sensitive grasp of changes in national politics and accurate appraisals of the changing strengths of neighboring regimes.

In strengthening authority within domains, rulers of the Five Dynasties, especially founding monarchs, relied heavily on military men, who played a particularly direct role in the political realm. Yet this widely recognized dominance of the military did not preclude the participation of the literati in government. As a matter of fact, these unlettered military rulers had to recruit a large number of literati as civil officials for various tasks after founding regimes consistent with the imperial style of the Tang. Thus the tension between the civil (*wen* 文) and the military (*wu* 武) constitutes one of the basic themes in the political history of the tenth century. As the Five Dynasties history shows, in order to legitimize their authority the military-oriented regimes necessarily turned to civil matters, such as organizing the bureaucracy and performing rituals but, ironically, the shift to the "*wen*"—along with the decay of the military power widely seen in the reigns of rulers of the second generation—quickly doomed many regimes.⁵⁰ A critical analysis of the civil-military relations during the reigns of Wang Jian and his heir are provided in chapters 5 and 6.

There are many reasons to choose the Former Shu as the subject of this case study. It was one of the first regional regimes to claim imperial status on the heels of the Tang collapse, and consequently led China into a multistate era that differed from former times both in content and in form. Occupying a territory that ranked third largest among the "Ten States" (only smaller than that of the Wu and its successor Southern Tang), Former Shu was one of the most politically and militarily successful regimes in the Five Dynasties period, succeeding not only in establishing a "legitimate" successor empire to the Tang in southwestern China but also in challenging the hegemonies of the contemporary northern dynasties and obtaining their recognition as a political equal. Thus, a careful treatment of the political history of the Former Shu, with a focus on its legitimation efforts and strategies in dealing with others, will help

us define the balance of power and the pragmatic attitude prevailing in the tenth century, as well as other characteristics of the national politics of the day, including the all-important impact of the Tang.

Admittedly, the Former Shu was unique in many aspects among the polities of the Five Dynasties. Its isolated location surrounded by a ring of mountains separated it from the heartland of China and consequently provided it with a unique opportunity for political autonomy, as revealed in chapter 1. But advantageous geographic conditions did not make Shu atypical. Inasmuch as Shu had to design appropriate strategies based on all available resources to survive this multistate period, it was no different from any other regional regime, especially those southern states facing pressure from both neighboring rivals and the northern dynasties.⁵¹ These pragmatic strategies were undoubtedly more a matter of choice, expedience, and opportunism than of location. Thus, although Shu bears its own distinct characteristics, it shares concerns and themes with other polities of the period. Indeed, it is precisely my purpose to situate the Former Shu within the historical contexts of both the Shu and its contemporary world, to trace both its unique development and its shared experience with other powers of the day, and to highlight the individuality of this regime as well as the common ground it shared with all the powers of the tenth century.

Last, the issue of source materials for this study deserves a brief discussion here. Although historical compilation efforts continued throughout the Five Dynasties period in both the northern and southern regimes, the materials left to later historians were still very limited due to the constant flux in dynasties and ongoing political division. Compared to the records of the “Five Dynasties,” which had been relatively well preserved into the early Song, those regarding the “Ten States” and other regional regimes were relatively scarce. The situation was even worse for regimes of the early tenth century.⁵² Thanks to the early Song historians, one can now trace the major outlines of the Former Shu and its rivals, though hardly satisfactorily, from official histories such as the old and new *Histories of Tang* and *Histories of the Five Dynasties*, especially the magisterial *Zizhi tongjian* compiled by Sima Guang.⁵³ Yet due

to Song biases embedded in the standard histories, works based on the original Shu records must be highlighted in this study. Among them the most important are the *History of the Nine States* (*Jiuguo zhi* 九國志), *History of Shu* (*Shu taowu* 蜀檣机), *Records of Admonition* (*Jianjie lu* 鑒誠錄) and *Records of the Shu Elite* (*Jinli qijiu zhuan* 錦裏耆舊傳).⁵⁴ Another set of valuable sources for this study are records of historical anecdotes (usually known as *biji* 筆記 or *xiaoshuo* 小說) from the tenth and eleventh centuries, such as the famous *Trivial Records of the Northern Dreamer* (*Beimeng suoyan* 北夢瑣言).⁵⁵ I also cite some works compiled by later historians, such as the aforementioned *Shiguo chunqiu*, whose overall quality has been widely recognized today.⁵⁶ To supplement the historical records, I have tried to incorporate a large group of other kinds of materials, ranging from literary texts like collections of essays and poems of contemporaries to Song encyclopedias, from geographic works and local gazettes to tomb inscriptions and archaeological finds.⁵⁷ Some modern studies on the Shu, of course, have also greatly contributed to my holistic understanding of the subject.⁵⁸

Based on the belief that “upon recounting, explanation arises,”⁵⁹ I adopt a narrative method in this book, hoping to draw a more colorful historical picture of the Former Shu and its rulers as well as the national politics of early tenth-century China. It was a time preceding the “great man” alluded to by Ouyang Xiu, “who did his deeds as harmony overtook the world.” Paradoxically, it is precisely the absence of “great men” that enabled regional rulers like Wang Jian to emerge and “share” the Mandate of Heaven with his rivals and lay the foundation for a new order.

CHAPTER 1

SHU IN THE TANG DYNASTY

錦城雖云樂，不如早還家。蜀道之難，難于上青天！側身西
望長咨嗟！

*Despite the renowned pleasures of the Brocade City,
A speedy return home is more to my liking.
Passage to Shu rivals ascent to Heaven in its hazards,
I can only heave a heavy sigh in gazing sideways to the west.*

—Li Bo 李白 (701–762), “Shudao nan” 蜀道難¹

When a rescript from the Tang capital Chang'an reached Chengdu, the seat of West Chuan 西川 in the Shu region of southwest China, reporting that the court had just appointed a new provincial governor named Chen Jingxuan 陳敬瑄 (d. 893), local officials were much surprised, for none of them knew the man or his background. Having worked in this wealthy and strategic region for years, local officials could recall a long list of former governors who either hailed from prestigious clans or had glorious official careers. But who was this Chen Jingxuan and why did the emperor trust him with an important governorship in this significant

place? Their bewilderment increased a few days later, when a stranger at a post station north of Chengdu proclaimed himself the new governor and asked for bribes. It soon turned out that the man was an imposter, who was executed immediately after the genuine appointee assumed his post.²

This episode vividly reveals the extraordinary importance attached to Shu in the Tang period. As will be demonstrated, the region is central to the subject of this book, the Former Shu regime and its founder Wang Jian. In its heyday, the territory of the Former Shu covered major parts of today's Sichuan, Chongqing, and the Hanzhong 漢中 area of Shaanxi province, as well as some lands in adjacent provinces including Guizhou, Yunnan, Hunan, Hubei, and Gansu. Despite frequent minor changes in its territorial makeup, the Sichuan Basin, especially the Chengdu Plain, remained the core domain of the Former Shu from its founding to its fall.³ Indeed, the Former Shu and all the other polities in Chinese history that went by the name "Shu," used it to designate the greater area centered on the Chengdu Plain. From any point of view, this area constitutes a significant part of China proper, both historically and in the present day. It is well known for its isolated geography, amazing wealth, large population, vibrant culture, and unique political traditions. Considering the centrality of this distinctive setting to our subject, I will provide a brief survey of Shu's physical conditions, historical development and communications with the rest of China, with a focus on its unique role during the Tang dynasty prior to the 880s, when Wang Jian emerged in this area and started to lay the foundation for his Shu empire.

A HISTORY OF SHU BEFORE THE TANG

Situated in the hinterland of southwest China, the greater Shu region encompasses a variegated topography, from the highlands in the north and west, to the basin and plain in the middle and the east, to the narrow gorges channeling the Yangzi River eastward. The territory is as large as France. On the western edge of Shu are mountainous areas, constituting the eastern extremity of the great Himalaya range, with an average altitude of over 9,000 feet above sea level. These, in turn, connect to the

Tibetan Plateau to the northwest. The landscape of the middle portion of Shu is quite different, consisting of a large basin with red soil. Fully surrounded by mountains—the Qionglai 邛崃 to the west, Daba 大巴 along the north, and Dalou 大婁 and Wu 巫 to the south and east respectively, this red basin is enriched by the upper Yangzi River and its tributaries. The Yangzi River forces an outlet through the mountain ranges on the eastern fringe of Shu, known as the “Three Gorges” (Sanxia 三峽), which stretch about one hundred miles eastward into modern-day Hubei. A little west of the red basin lies the famous Chengdu Plain, which is about 3,500 square miles in size and has been the economic, political and cultural center of southwest China for over two millennia. The semitropical climate usually stays warm and humid for most of the year. Along with fertile soil, the climate has proven advantageous for agricultural growth, creating a reputation for productivity in Chinese history.⁴

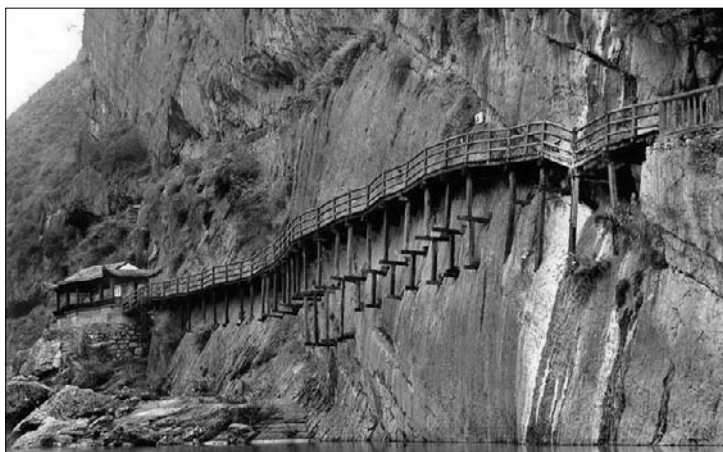
Amazing civilizations were created by the native Shu peoples as early as the Shang 商 dynasty (eighteenth to twelfth c. BCE), when Shu came into direct contact with North China.⁵ According to the *Book of History* (*Shang shu* 尚書), in the year 1122 BCE, when King Wu of Zhou 周武王 conducted an expedition against the Shang, his allied troops included warriors from the Shu area.⁶ During the late Spring and Autumn and early Warring States periods 春秋戰國 (ca. fifth century BCE), the Shu and Ba 巴 peoples founded states centering in the Chengdu Plain and the gorge area, respectively. Subsequently, the combined area was also called Ba-Shu 巴蜀. Later, the Shu state expanded its territory to the edge of the southern Wei River 渭水, an area known as Guanzhong 關中 in the current Shaanxi province, where it engaged in wars with the Qin 秦 state. But after the first half of the fourth century BCE, the Shu lost the strength to compete with the Qin and had to retreat to their base area. The Ba state to the east shared a similar fate in this period. Facing the bellicose Chu state to the east, Ba was forced to surrender its territory beyond the gorges.⁷

The states of Shu and Ba retained their autonomy until 316 BCE, when the powerful Qin conquered the Shu and later destroyed the Ba to the east, destroying the independence of the region and incorporating it into Chinese territory for the first time in history. Over the next few

centuries, throughout the Qin–Han 秦漢 period (221 BCE–220 CE), Shu experienced rapid agricultural and commercial development. Increasingly more Chinese immigrants flowed into the region from the north, bringing advanced planting technology and helping the rich Chengdu Plain gain a reputation as the “Heaven’s Storehouse” (*tianfu* 天府).⁸ The routes, known as “Shudao 蜀道” (Roads to Shu), which ran through the precipitous Qinling 秦嶺 and Daba Mountains and connected Guanzhong to inner Shu, were mainly developed during this period.⁹ The impact of these contacts with North China finished the Shu region’s Sinicization process and transformed it into an integral part of China proper, changing from “the Ba-Shu of Ba-Shu” to “the Ba-Shu of China.”¹⁰ From then on, Shu played a significant role in Chinese history, especially during times of dynastic transition.

In general, two distinct characteristics of Shu have been observed in Chinese political history since the Qin conquest.¹¹ First, the region was frequently captured by ambitious powers, mainly from North China, to permit a strategic detour around the formidable barrier of the Yangzi River to conquer territories in the south and unify the whole country. The

FIGURE 1. Shudao.



first unified Chinese empire, Qin (221–206 BCE), presents the first example of this strategy. Relying on Shu's wealth, human capital, and crucial location, the Qin subjugated the Chu state to its southeast and ultimately achieved the great unification of China in 221 BCE.¹² The same military strategy was also followed by its successor, the Han (206 BCE–220 CE). In his competition with the other hegemony, Gaozu高祖 (r. 206–194 BCE), the founding emperor of Han, took Shu as his base, from which he conducted an expedition against his enemies with the aid of Shu supplies and manpower, and finally unified the country.¹³ About five centuries later, in 279, the Western Jin 西晉 (265–316) launched a military expedition from Shu and achieved a reunification after almost a century of division. Another short-lived, yet historically important, dynasty in Chinese history, the Sui 隋 (581–618), showed the same interest in Shu. One year before the founding of Sui, Yang Jian 楊堅 (r. 581–605) sent a force to seize the passes along the Shudao so that the entire Shu region could later be occupied easily. In the year 589, with the aid of a navy trained in eastern Shu, the Sui conquered the last southern regime and reunified China after three centuries of division under the Southern and Northern Dynasties.¹⁴

The second distinct characteristic of Shu is its strong separatist tendency. The incorporation of the Shu area into China proper during the Qin–Han period did not discourage its tendency toward separatism, in part a result of its geographic isolation from the heartland of China and its self-sufficient economy. The Shu people were historically known for their “inclination to revolt due to formidable topography” (*shi xian hao luan* 恃險好亂).¹⁵ An old saying has it that “Shu always precedes other regions in causing tumult and is the last in the world to accept imperial governance” (天下未亂蜀先亂，天下既治蜀後治).¹⁶ As a rule, once rebels sealed the Shudao from the inside, the region would soon become an independent state not easily pacified by the central government, especially in the context of political disorders in the heartland. This independent spirit has continued into the modern period and even influenced policies of the People's Republic of China in the twentieth century.¹⁷ Indeed, from the beginning of the Qin annexation, the history of Shu can be read as a continuous series of conflicts between the indwelling forces

of political separatism and independence and those of unification and conquest by “central” governments in the north.

As early as the fifth year after the Qin conquered Shu, an insurgency broke out in the vassal state. Soon after its repression, surviving Shu elites launched another rebellion in 301 BCE. A third episode of recalcitrance beset the Qin again sixteen years later, prompting the Qin government to decide to establish a prefecture in the area and put Shu under its direct control.¹⁸ The first independent regime in Shu after the Qin conquest was the Cheng 成 state (25–36), a polity established by Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 36). Taking advantage of the chaos in the early first century, Gongsun occupied Shu and proclaimed himself emperor in the year 25. His Cheng regime lasted twelve years and was later vanquished by the Eastern Han 東漢 dynasty (25–220) from the north.¹⁹

When Liu Bei 劉備 (162–223) entered Shu at the beginning of the third century, China was split into three principal regimes in the political turbulence of the last years of the Han, namely, Wei 魏 (220–265) in North China, Wu 吳 (222–280) in the lower Yangzi areas, and Liu’s Shu (221–263, usually known as Shu-Han 蜀漢). Centered in the Chengdu plain, the Shu-Han occupied a large territory including today’s Sichuan, Chongqing, south Shaanxi and Gansu, and parts of Yunnan, Guizhou, and Hubei. Under the administration of its capable minister Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181–234), the economy of Shu underwent further development. After a few years of preparation, and with the aid of the resources of Shu, Zhuge Liang launched a series of wars against the Wei aiming to unify the country. Though these expeditions ultimately ended in failure, they reaffirmed the crucial strategic role of Shu. During this period, some new sections of the Shudao were constructed with formidable passes and forts, such as the famous Sword Gate Pass (Jianmen guan 劍門關) located in today’s northeast Sichuan, the most strategic and easily defended fortress securing the Chengdu plain from the north. But when Zhuge Liang passed away, the Shu-Han heir proved too inept to maintain power in the region, let alone fulfill his predecessor’s dream of unification. In 263, when Wei troops detoured around the dangerous Sword Gate and entered the Chengdu plain, surrender was the only option left to the Shu emperor.²⁰

Another significant separation of Shu from the rest of China occurred in the late third century, when a serious famine in the northwest drove thousands of starving peasants into Shu. Oppression by local bureaucrats provoked the fleeing immigrants to revolt. Led by Li Te 李特 (d. 303), the rebels soon gained support from local Shu people and defeated official troops. At the end of 303, Li Te's son occupied Chengdu, and three years later he founded a state called "Great Cheng 大成." Known as Cheng-Han 成漢 (306–347) in history, this state was destroyed in the mid-fourth century by the successor to the Western Jin.²¹ Subsequently, the Shu region became an alluring prize for both the non-Chinese powers in North China and the Chinese dynasties in the south, until the occupation of Shu by the Sui.²²

SHU IN THE TANG DYNASTY

After the Sui was replaced by the Tang dynasty in 618, Shu continued to play a crucial role in national politics. The two characteristics of Shu observed above were manifested again and some new features were also exposed in the political transition during Tang times. An examination of Shu in the Tang will be helpful to understanding the historical background of the Former Shu regime Wang Jian established during the waning of the Tang empire.

Three Circuits of Jiannan in the Early Tang

When the emperor Gaozu of Tang (r. 618–626) seized power in Guanzhong during the fall of the Sui, the entire Shu was largely spared civil war because of its remoteness and isolation from turbulent North China. Appreciating the strategic importance of Shu, Gaozu dispatched emissaries to persuade the local officials to accept his authority immediately after he rose to power in Chang'an. Several capable generals, including a prince, were sent to Shu, where they quickly established the military occupation that preceded reunification.²³ In 620, hardened Shu troops helped the able prince Li Shimin 李世民 (Taizong 太宗, r. 626–649) in his campaigns against rivals in North China. The following year, a Tang

governor led a navy built in Shu eastward toward the middle Yangzi, defeating remnant Sui loyalists.²⁴ And two years later, the Tang restored peace throughout the whole country. The strategy of using the Shu was a vital part of Tang unification.²⁵

An empire with its political center in Guanzhong, the Tang had plenty of reasons to prioritize the security of the region and its surrounding areas.²⁶ Not surprisingly, the strategic geography of Shu drew the attention of the court from the beginning. Besides Shu's importance in the defense of its southwestern frontiers, another worry of the Tang government was obvious: the Shu region with formidable mountainous barriers and abundant supplies, could easily breed separatism. Therefore throughout the dynasty, the government endeavored to strengthen its control over the area and curtail any potential separatist ambition while harnessing the most able of provincial leaders.

As early as 618, to consolidate its authority in southwest China, the government established a military headquarters (zongguanfu 總管府) in Chengdu, administering seventeen prefectures in the land of Shu and the frontier area extending south to today's Yunnan province. For the same reason, another zongguanfu was set up in the neighboring Hanzhong area, in today's southern Shaanxi province, a "connection region" (*jindai zhi di* 襟帶之地), which contained a number of major roads to Shu.²⁷ Under Taizong's reign, the empire was divided into ten large "circuits" (*dao* 道) based on traditional or geographic boundaries.²⁸ Under this territorial division, the Shu region was divided mainly into two circuits: Jiannan 劍南 (lit. South of Sword Gate), which roughly covered the major part of the traditional Shu area from the Jianmen to the deep south of Sichuan, and Shannan 山南 (lit. South of Zhongnan Mountain 終南山), which ran through Sichuan's northern borders to Hanzhong, as well as the vast areas from the east bank of Jialing River 嘉陵江 to the middle Yangzi. In this arrangement, the wealthy Chengdu plain and the strategic Hanzhong area linking inner Shu to Guanzhong were administered separately under two different provincial units, both of which were guarded with more military garrisons than any other circuit in south

China.²⁹ About a century later, in 733, under emperor Xuanzong's 玄宗 (r. 712–756) new proposal of national territorial division, the whole country was divided into fifteen provincial circuits, and the Shannan area was further split into two parts: the Shannan West 山南西, which covered Hanzhong and northeastern Sichuan, and the Shannan East 山南東 in the middle Yangzi region.³⁰ Later, in 757, under Suzong's 肅宗 reign (756–762), Jiannan was also cut into two parts, East Chuan 東川 and West Chuan.³¹ These subdivisions can be seen as a strategy of the central government to introduce a balance of power into the area and prevent potential rebellion or military insubordination, which again reveals the court's worry about Shu's separatist tendencies.³² Hereafter, the three major circuits in southwest China, the East and West Chuan and the Shannan West, together encompassing the traditional greater Shu lands, were customarily referred to as one entity, the "Three Circuits of Jiannan" (劍南三川) or simply, "Three Chuan."³³

Throughout most of the Tang dynasty, the productive Shu region proved an increasingly indispensable resource base for the empire, contributing greatly to its stability and prosperity.³⁴ On many occasions, when Guanzhong suffered famine, the court could always obtain resources from wealthy Shu for relief.³⁵ In the eyes of an early Tang official, Shu was "a storehouse of treasure for the state" (*guo zhi baofu* 國之寶府) and its abundant rice could "save the heartland of China if transported downstream along the Yangzi River" (人富粟多浮江而下可濟中國). According to the same person, in addition to the annual taxes and tributes it transported to the capital, Shu's wealth also funded most of the cost of military defenses, postal communications, and daily commercial transactions in the large area of northwest China, the most important region for Tang's national security.³⁶ Shu, along with the productive lower Yangzi, constituted a pillar of state revenues from the early Tang until the late ninth century.³⁷

Given the tremendous importance of Shu to the empire, the Tang court took great care in the selection of officials for the three circuits. As early as the 710s, the court installed military governors as leading administrators for Jiannan.³⁸ Thereafter, men appointed to the post were

strictly selected from the senior courtiers including the chief ministers. People without career backgrounds as “senior generals, wise ministers, or extraordinarily meritorious officials” (上將賢相殊勳) were ineligible for the governorship of Jiannan.³⁹ And, not surprisingly, serving as governor of Jiannan improved one’s chances of ascending to the post of chief minister later in life.⁴⁰ Jiannan, and especially West Chuan centering on the core area of the Chengdu plain, was seen by the Tang people as “a place where chief minister candidates flew back and forth” (宰相回翔之地)—a local post and catapult to metropolitan power.⁴¹ Similarly, the strategic Shannan West also deserved the deployment of highly respected governors, who, in the words of the Tang people, had to be “men of versatile talents” (*quancai* 全才) and “trusted courtiers” (*xinchen* 信臣).⁴² Thus, notably in the history of Tang, courtiers with a background as Shu governors played a very important role in national politics.⁴³

A Sanctuary for a Court in Exile

The Tang empire reached its heyday during Xuanzong’s reign, a period of great prosperity, of important institutional changes, and of tremendous flowering in both literature and art. But the stability and growth did not survive the final years of this aging monarch, whose rule was almost ended by An Lushan 安祿山 (703–757), a powerful military governor in northeast China.⁴⁴ Significantly, during the rebellion, the isolated and wealthy Shu became the emperor’s sanctuary, allowing the exiled court to weather the protracted crisis.

The An Lushan rebellion from 755 to 763 gave rise to powerful provincial governors, the so-called Jiedushi 節度使. At first, faced with the need for surveillance of prefectural and district officials, the Tang government relied on *ad hoc* commissioners sent from the capital to supervise a variety of activities. After the first century of the Tang, under pressure from the frontier, the court established a number of military commands (*jun* 軍) along the northern and northwestern borders and installed governors there to manage military affairs. During the early reign of Xuanzong, more commands under the control of such military

governors were established for frontier defense, covering one or more prefectures. Those governors gradually seized more responsibilities, encroaching on the jurisdiction of civil officials in the frontier areas. These military commands under ambitious governors posed a growing threat to the central government which came to fruition in the disastrous An Lushan rebellion.⁴⁵

When the rebellious troops approached Chang'an in the summer of 756, Xuanzong fled the capital and sought safety in Shu. Obviously Xuanzong had already considered Shu a prospective sanctuary, for he appointed two princes as the governors of Shannan and Jiannan one year before.⁴⁶ Its isolated geography and sufficient supplies appealed to both emperor and courtiers. One attendant suggested that Xuanzong move to Shu with these words: "Though lacking in spaciousness, Jiannan has fertile lands and a large population. A topography of mountains and rivers offers security from within and without. And I also believe that the Shudao is accessible to our men" (劍南雖窄，土富人繁，表裏山河，內外險固，以臣所料，蜀道可行).⁴⁷

Admittedly, the formidable Shudao, in the words of Tang poet Li Bo, "rivals ascent to heaven in its hazards." Nonetheless, the routes had been well maintained in Tang times and were "passable." For example, from the capital area in Guanzhong to Hanzhong in the Shannan West, there were three major routes that led southwest into inner Shu. The old Luo Valley Road 駱穀道 through the Qinling Mountain was rebuilt in 624. The longest yet least difficult road, Chencang Road 陳倉道 (also known as Gudao 故道 or Yidao 驛道), had become the official route for postal relay during Tang times, replete with lodgings to facilitate travel. Moreover, the most famous, the Bao-Xie Road 褒斜道, developed in the Han period, ran through the Qinling Mountain and continued to serve as a major route.⁴⁸

Xuanzong's exiled court took the Bao-Xie Road to the southwest in 756.⁴⁹ But the monarch's journey proved more difficult than he had imagined. At the beginning of their flight, soldiers of the imperial army coerced the emperor to kill his favorite consort Yang Yuhuan 楊玉環 (719–756), whom they held responsible for the turmoil in the country.⁵⁰

Soon after Xuanzong arrived in Shu, his heir apparent ascended the throne and became emperor Suzong, and immediately showed interest in the wealthy Shu. In order to cover military expenses, the new monarch sent officials to a number of productive provinces across China, including Shu, to collect extra taxes from local rich families.⁵¹ It was around this time that the Tang government decided to split Jiannan into two circuits for better control. Later, as the war continued and rebels frequently disrupted canal transportation in the Central Plains, the Tang court became even more dependent on Shu's resources.

Understandably, military commands proliferated during the period to suppress the An Lushan Rebellion. After the rebellion was suppressed in 763, military governors became increasingly entrenched across the country, especially in northeast China, where several former commanders of An Lushan were installed as governors. Gradually, more governors came to control the appointments of prefectural and district officials and manipulate tax receipts within their circuits, gaining a greater regional autonomy that threatened the authority of the central government. Thus, in the aftermath of the rebellion, Tang emperors vied for decades, without complete success, to recover control over the military governors. For example, Dezong 德宗 (r. 780–805) strove to restore imperial authority by curtailing administrative and fiscal powers of the unruly provinces. But, in 781, when he attempted to revive regular bureaucratic processes in those areas by sending new governors from the court, a new wave of revolts broke out. More dangerously, the punitive troops summoned from the northwestern commands themselves mutinied near the capital, putting the court in great danger again.⁵² In 784, Dezong was driven into a nightmarish flight from the capital, following the path of his great grandfather Xuanzong and heading south. By taking the arduous Luo Valley Road through the Qinling Mountain, Dezong reached Shannan West, where he felt safe enough to relinquish the plan to go farther south to Chengdu. Again, he came to “rely on Shu as [a] base” (倚劍蜀為根本) to quell the revolt in time.⁵³

Dezong was not the last Tang emperor to flee toward Shu to escape danger. As will be seen later, Shu provided sanctuary for another emperor

at the end of the Tang. And once again, the strategic Shu area served both as sanctuary for the exiled court and as a resource base to pacify rebels. The distinct role of Shu in the Tang dynasty can be generalized in the words of Yu Shenxing 于慎行 (1545–1608):

唐都長安，每有寇盜，輒為出奔之舉，恃有蜀也。所以再奔再北而未至亡國，亦幸有蜀也。長安之地，天府四塞，譬如堂之有室，蜀以膏沃之土，處其闔閭，譬如室之有奧也。風雨晦明，有所依而避焉。自秦漢以來，巴蜀為外府，而唐卒賴以不亡，斯其效也。

Every time the Tang capital, Chang'an, was imperiled by rebels, the court took flight to Shu, on which it relied. Thus it was because of Shu that the Tang could survive by running away and then returning. The relationship of Chang'an to the isolated "Heaven's Storehouse" was like that of a hall to its inner chamber. The productive Shu, contained by mountains, was like the deeper recess of an inner room. Shu was a place where the Tang sought shelter whenever danger came. As an important prefecture outside of Guanzhong since the Qin–Han period, the Bashu region successfully helped the Tang escape destruction.⁵⁴

A Base for Appeasing "Southwestern Barbarians"

Since the Qin conquest, Shu, and especially the Chengdu Plain, had served as a frontier base by which the central Chinese government expanded its territory southward, exploited the local resources, and controlled the native peoples of the vast southwest. During the Tang dynasty, the Chengdu Plain was definitely more developed in virtually every respect than any other area along the southwestern border, where there "has always been an area of great ethnic and geographical complexity."⁵⁵ Indeed, for a long time before and then throughout the late Tang period, the current northwestern and southwestern Sichuan and most of Yunnan and Guizhou provinces had been regarded as frontiers "beyond [the reach of] imperial order" (*xi wai* 徼外).⁵⁶ The Chinese government had maintained nominal control by appointing the chieftains of local peoples as officials to administer their own affairs, a policy traditionally known as loose control (*jimi* 羈縻). Not

surprisingly, the highly developed inner Shu became the political center for such control in southwest China.

Based on the foundations laid by the Sui, the Tang government continued the traditional “*jimi*” policy and buttressed it with military might in Shu and neighboring areas.⁵⁷ In the early Tang, the government established a few hundred *jimi* prefectures under the administration of several larger military institutions, most of which were subordinated to the circuit of Jiannan.⁵⁸ Recognizing the paramount role of Shu as a citadel for frontier consolidation in the southwest, the government also paid close attention to the maintenance of communication lines between the Chengdu Plain and the frontier areas to its south and west in order to guarantee effective supervision and to facilitate military intervention from Chengdu.⁵⁹ Later, the crucial strategic value of Shu was further heightened as the hostile Tibet 吐蕃 and Nanzhao 南詔 regimes emerged as major rivals to the Tang’s supremacy in the region. As stated in the *Old History of Tang*, Shu bore the awesome responsibility to “resist Tibet in the west and appease the barbarians in the south” (西抗吐蕃，南撫蠻僚).⁶⁰

From the middle seventh century on, the rapidly growing power of Tibet to the northwest of Shu posed a major threat to Tang interests in the area.⁶¹ In order to neutralize the influence of Tibet, from the late seventh to the early eighth centuries, the Tang deliberately promoted another non-Chinese power, the Nanzhao, which rose fast in western Yunnan and joined the competition between the Tang and Tibet for domination of the area.⁶² But the events that followed proved the folly of this new policy. When the honeymoon between the Tang and Nanzhao was over, the growing military threat of Nanzhao became another annoying hindrance to Tang dominance in the area. The situation worsened after Nanzhao allied with Tibet to invade its Chinese neighbor. To punish the ungrateful Nanzhao, the Tang organized three wars during Xuanzong’s Tianbao 天寶 era (742–756), all of which proved abject failures. Thereafter, the Tang lost control of most of its long-established forts in Yunnan, and Jiannan, along its southwestern border, was beset by constant looting.⁶³

Once the Tang court had recovered temporarily from its catastrophic internal chaos, it soon took action to restore stability in Shu. Dezong

appointed the capable general Wei Gao 韋皋 (746–806) as governor of West Chuan. Achieving a series of victories over the invading Tibetans, Wei Gao successfully brought the treacherous Nanzhao back under Tang suzerainty. During Wei Gao's tenure in Shu from 785 to 805, Tang armies, with military aid from Nanzhao, defeated Tibet several times, not only driving it out of most of Yunnan but also subjugating many tribes living in the mountainous borders between the Tang and Tibet.⁶⁴ Restored relations with Nanzhao provided Shu a half-century of peace along its southern borders. And Chengdu became the regional political and cultural center, as thousands of elite Nanzhao youths were sent to Chengdu to learn Chinese language and mathematical skills.⁶⁵

But this temporary peace did not last into the ninth century, as another series of wars between Nanzhao and Tang broke out in the 820s. In 829, Nanzhao invaded inner Shu from two directions, even penetrating the western suburbs of Chengdu city.⁶⁶ The invasion left Shu in a state of exhaustion, its economy depleted. From then on, almost all the southern prefectures of Shu suffered directly from Nanzhao's attacks. The situation got a little better only after 830, when the court selected another capable governor, Li Deyu 李德裕 (787–850), a former minister who effectively used his short tenure to strengthen Shu's defenses by providing the province with more and better-trained soldiers and establishing a newly buttressed perimeter of fortifications.⁶⁷ His efforts proved very successful in bringing Shu back to its previous prosperity and stability for the next two decades.

During the second half of the ninth century, while the internal chaos of Tibet diminished its threat to the Tang, the danger from Nanzhao continued and occasionally even worsened. In 868, after suffering two consecutive defeats along the southern bank of the Dadu River 大渡河 on the southern edge of Shu, Tang armies lost the whole territory beyond the river and had to retreat northward. When the relief army sent from Chengdu failed to repel the invaders, the city suffered a second siege and the subsequent plundering of its suburbs.⁶⁸ In the late Tang, especially during the reign of Yizong 懿宗 (r. 859–873), Nanzhao troops launched at least three massive invasions into inner Shu.⁶⁹ Shu suffered

tremendous losses during the wars. As a Tang official reported, “the vast land covering eight hundred *li* [between Chengdu and the Dadu River] was devoid of either people or livestock” (八百里之間民畜為空).⁷⁰ Thereafter, although the Tang troops led by the new governor, Gao Pian 高駢 (d. 887), rebuffed the last invasion of Nanzhao in 875, Shu was not totally immune to threats from the Nanzhao and its successors until the rise of Wang Jian two decades later.

To summarize, it is clear that, as a vital part of the Tang’s southwest territory, the Shu region functioned as a buffer between central China and the hostile regimes in the southwest, a base from which the government extracted supplies for broader frontier defense, recruited and dispatched troops to pacify the borders, and manipulated its relations with non-Chinese powers, while appeasing the unassimilated “barbarian” tribes. The governors of Shu, especially those of West Chuan, were leading deputies of the central government, whose capabilities directly influenced Shu’s stability. Yet in the chaotic last years of the Tang, when the court confronted insubordinate military governors in growing numbers, it preferred to select reliable officials for Shu in hopes of securing this pivotal region.

The Tendency toward Autonomy

The political history of Tang after the An Lushan rebellion is marked by struggles between the central government and increasingly autonomous military governors. With more and more provincial governors in the north challenging imperial authority, the Tang government had to deal with those traditionally obedient provinces in south China with exceptional care, with regard to both personnel and fiscal affairs. The Shu region doubtless attracted great attention from the court.

Compared to the provinces in North China and most commands in the south, the three circuits of Jiannan were relatively tractable during the middle and late Tang. This docile image, however, is not accurate because if one looks at the lasting struggles between the Tang court and the military governors of the Shu, a land naturally possessing a geography ideal for separation. When Xuanzong took refuge in Chengdu, the frontier

troops, who suffered greatly from the wars with Nanzhao during the Tianbao era, launched two mutinies in succession in 757. From that time onward, the Chengdu plain had entered into a sensitive period that brought more troubles for the court. In 761, when the court was still at war with rebels in the north, a general at Zizhou 梓州 (today's Santai of Sichuan province) banished the governor of East Chuan and openly revolted.⁷¹ Just one year after suppressing this rebellion, another one erupted in West Chuan, where a military commander usurped the power of the governor of Jiannan and sent his troops northward to block the entry of a punitive army from the capital.⁷² A few years later, a mighty general of the defense armies on the western frontier occupied Chengdu, murdered the court-appointed governor, and defeated loyal troops from other surrounding prefectures. In the end, the court had to compromise and appoint him governor of West Chuan to avoid large-scale turbulence in Shu.⁷³ Even when Dezong fled southward to escape mutinies in Guanzhong, Shu did not welcome the absconded sovereign peacefully. A short yet very dangerous mutiny occurred in Chengdu in 783, only a year before Dezong went into exile at Shannan.⁷⁴ Recognizing the importance of Shu's stability to his central authority, Dezong appointed Wei Gao, one of the most capable generals, as the governor of West Chuan in 785, immediately after his return to the capital. Under the auspices of Wei Gao, the court's base along the southwest frontier entered a stable, peaceful and prosperous stage which lasted more than two decades.

The long tenure of Wei Gao in Shu, however, had other consequences. It also fostered autonomous tendencies as the powerful governor's personal influence became entrenched in all levels of administration within the province. Like those recalcitrant governors in the northern provinces, Wei Gao dominated nearly all administrative, fiscal, and military affairs, enjoying freedom to appoint prefectural officials and construct his own power structure across the province.⁷⁵ Understandably, the court tolerated this semi-independent status of Shu, not only because it needed Wei Gao to contain the threat of Nanzhao and Tibet but also because Shu had continued to provide taxes and supplies to the capital.

But this tacit consent of the court ultimately produced bitter fruit. When Wei Gao died in his post in 805, Liu Pi 劉辟 (d. 806), one of Wei's favorite officers, assumed power over West Chuan and petitioned for an official appointment from the capital. The court, which was in a transition between reigns, could do nothing but compromise again. But when the greedy Liu Pi begged for authorization to administer the entire three Chuan and invaded East Chuan in 806, the new court under Xianzong 憲宗 (r. 806–820) had to take action and launched an expeditionary army to restore order in Shu.⁷⁶ Following this victory, Xianzong devoted much of his reign to the restoration of imperial authority across China. In this well-known restoration, the central government effectively strengthened its control in Shu.⁷⁷ From this time onward, the three circuits of Shu remained obedient and their governors continued to obey the orders of the central government until the last two decades of the ninth century, when the chaos caused by peasant rebellions spread across the country, and Shu—the last straw of the dying Tang—could no longer save it from demise.

SHU DURING THE LATE TANG

When emperor Xizong 僖宗 (r. 873–888), a twelve-year-old child, ascended the throne in 873, the weak central government of the Tang was further wracked by the expansion of provincial autonomy, the domination of eunuchs at court, a relentless string of natural disasters, recurring peasant rebellions, and military mutinies across China.⁷⁸ During this period, Shu could hardly remain stable when the whole country was in trouble. Although Nanzhao's last massive invasion had been defeated in 874, the victory did not bring Chengdu lasting peace. Governor Gao Pian's stern laws and unfair treatment of local Shu soldiers provoked a mutiny the next year, which was followed by Gao's ordering a brutal massacre as an act of revenge. Three years later, the governor was replaced by Cui Anqian 崔安潛, who started to weed out the cronies of his predecessor.⁷⁹ But his effective leadership in Chengdu soon ended through the intervention of a powerful eunuch able to manipulate the young emperor.

The domination of eunuchs at court constitutes a serious and persistent problem in the history of Tang. Originally servants of low rank, eunuchs were later placed in charge of the imperial army, especially the most formidable Shence Army 神策軍, and increasingly received high-ranking positions starting with Xuanzong's reign. Ultimately, this group wielded sufficient power to interfere with state affairs and even manipulate the selection of several monarchs in the ninth century.⁸⁰ Under Xizong's reign, the most powerful eunuch was Tian Lingzi 田令孜 (d. 893), who headed the Shence Army and dominated court affairs, possessing "the power to change the will of Heaven" (有回天之力) in the eyes of his contemporaries.⁸¹ In the year 880, noticing that peasant rebellions in North China were almost out of control, Tian began to prepare for a retreat to the remote Shu, where he decided in advance to install his own cronies. Four generals, all Tian's favorites in the Shence Army, including his brother Chen Jingxuan, were proposed to the emperor as candidates for the governorships of the three circuits of Shu.⁸² It is said that the final decision was made based on the points won by the generals in a polo game. As the winner, Chen Jingxuan was appointed governor of the all-important West Chuan, which began his decade-long domination over the wealthy Chengdu Plain.⁸³

In the winter of 880, when peasant rebels occupied Luoyang and then advanced to Tongguan 潼關, the last strategic pass shielding Chang'an from the east, Xizong fled the capital and sought sanctuary in Shu, as two of his predecessors (Xuanzong and Dezong) had done a century before. Taking the arduous Luo Valley Road, Xizong first arrived at Xingyuan 興元 (today's Hanzhong of Shaanxi province) in early 881, and then ran southwest; further into Chengdu, where he stayed until late 884.⁸⁴ Shu, however, could not save the faltering Tang this time. It became, instead, the historic stage for a low-ranking military man, Wang Jian, to realize his ambition.

CHAPTER 2

THE RISE OF WANG JIAN, 884–903

馬作的盧飛快，弓如霹靂弦驚。了却君王天下事，贏得生前
身後名。

*Steeds charge at the speed of flight,
Crossbows frighten with a thunderous clap,
We will finish the monarch's mission to unify the realm
And be immortalized both in this life and the next.*

—Xin Qiji 辛弃疾 (1140–1207), “Po zhen zi” 破陣子¹

In the winter of 884, Wang Jian finally decided to leave Xingyuan, the seat of the Shannan West Circuit, which had been occupied by a treacherous Tang general for nearly a year. Joined by four other officers with several thousand soldiers under their direct command, this lower-ranking captain, claiming his intent to “meet the emperor,” unhesitatingly headed westward, where the Shudao connected the inner Shu and the Tang capital Chang’an.² About one and a half months later, emperor Xizong

and his entourage headed in the opposite direction along the same route, following the Shudao on their return to Chang'an, where palaces had been restored after the defeat of peasant rebels one and a half years earlier. The encounter between Wang Jian and the emperor was expected by both sides. For the military man, who had just broken away from the citadel of bandits, the encounter would offer a good chance to clear his reputation and become a member of the imperial army; for the young emperor, in dire need of military forces to restore authority, Wang Jian's desire to "rescue the imperial throne in danger" (*qinwang* 勤王) was doubtless appreciated.

The year 884 left a distinct mark on the history of the late Tang. That summer, after nearly ten years of devastating war across the country, a nation-wide peasant rebellion was finally put down. Xizong ended his exile in Chengdu and prepared to reestablish the court's presence in Chang'an. But the suppression of the rebellion did not bring lost authority back to the Tang court. What ensued was a series of more serious problems. The financial crisis faced by the court grew worse due to the shrinking size of the domain under its direct control, which impeded the collection of taxes and tribute. Court affairs were tightly manipulated by the eunuch Tian Lingzi, whose domination not only generated tensions at the court but also incurred vehement opposition from provincial governors. With the appointments of many former rebel generals as military governors, more provinces—not only from the traditionally troublesome Hebei and Shandong in the northern plains but also in Guanzhong, the capital region—started to challenge the central government. As a consequence, ceaseless wars of annexation among ambitious governors continued to complicate the distribution of power in the last years of the Tang.³ As of 884, a historian remarked, "[t]he dynasty was now virtually destroyed."⁴ With a number of regional regimes established across China from that year onwards, a period of division known as the Five Dynasties and Ten States soon replaced the great Tang dynasty.

As the year 884 passed, Wang Jian, who would be one of the founders of the "Ten States," was still waiting for the imperial carriage of

Xizong along the Shudao. One day in the early spring of 885, when the imperial procession emerged from the deep valley along the Jialing River and approached a small post about seventy-five miles southwest of Xingyuan, Wang Jian and other captains with their troops had already arrived, preparing to salute the monarch. The ovation probably inspired the exiled and powerless emperor on his return journey, and he bestowed abundant rewards on the officers and highly “praised them” (*jia zhi* 嘉之).⁵ At that moment, Wang Jian was thirty-seven years old. From then on, his personal fortune was tightly tied to the Tang court. In the following years, Wang Jian wisely utilized imperial favor to serve his own interests, gradually transforming himself from a wastrel and mercenary to a general of the imperial Shence army and eventually to a military governor of the waning Tang.

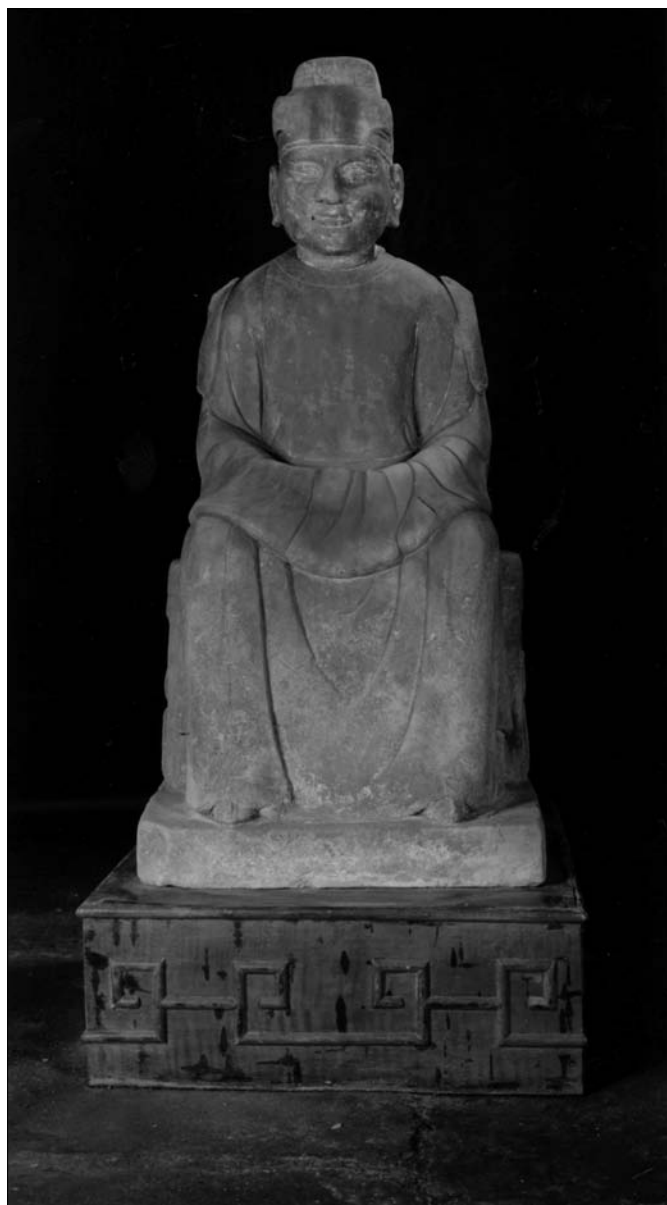
A DONKEY THIEF

Known as Henan 河南 (“lit. South of the Yellow River”) province today, the region in the middle of the Central Plains constituted the heart of the administrative circuit of the same name, Henan *dao*, in the Tang dynasty, and played an important role in the empire’s politics and economy.⁶ The eastern capital, Luoyang, was in its west, and the Guanzhong area, where the primary capital Chang’an was located, was a little further west. The Bian River 汴河 canal, the vital artery on which the capitals and the central government depended for transporting supplies from the productive lower Yangzi region, ran across Henan from the southeast.⁷ But this strategic area suffered a drastic depopulation from the devastation of the An Lushan rebellion in the mid-eighth century. During the post-rebellion period, as the military governors in Hebei and Shandong in the north and east became more unruly, Henan was used by the Tang government as a new “frontier” between Guanzhong and the disobedient provinces in the northeast. The court established a number of military districts and garrisoned a high concentration of troops there.⁸ Yet despite the government’s efforts to maintain its authority over this strategic region, from the end of the An Lushan rebellion, mil-

itary mutinies, attempts by ambitious governors to establish autonomy, and the ensuing ferment across the region seldom ceased. Moreover, due to a succession of punitive wars between the central government and the recalcitrant governors in the northeast, the people of Henan suffered heavier burdens, such as extra taxes and frequent conscriptions, than anywhere else in the country.⁹ As Edwin G. Pulleyblank put it, “It is probably no accident that when peasant rebellions eventually broke out in the 860s and 70s, they started in Honan [Henan].”¹⁰ In this environment, Wang Jian emerged onto the historical stage and laid the cornerstone to found his empire.

Wang Jian was born at Wuyang 舞陽, a small county of Xuzhou 許州 (today’s Xuchang) in southwestern Henan on February 26, 847.¹¹ Before joining the army in his mid-twenties, Wang Jian had been active mainly at Xuzhou and the neighboring prefecture Chenzhou 陳州 (today’s Huaiyang) to the southeast. Thus this “Chen-Xu” region was referred to as Wang Jian’s native place by his contemporaries, a place where many of his lifelong comrades were also born.¹² Based on descriptions in written sources and a statue found in his tomb, he had lush eyebrows and a broad forehead, all in all “a majestic visage” (*zhuangmao weiran* 狀貌偉然).¹³ Though counted as the eighth male child in the clan, sources only cite one older sister, implying that Wang Jian did not have any other surviving siblings.¹⁴ The records of his family background vary greatly among the sources. One source describes his father, Wang Qing 王慶, as an “influential magnate in the region” (*li zhi haoyou* 裏之豪右), but another says Wang Jian’s family had made a living as a baker for generations (*shi wei bingshi* 世為餅師).¹⁵ Despite the controversial records, most historians of later generations believe that his family was not a wealthy or respected one in Xuzhou. He was illiterate, as *Zizhi tongjian* reports, “not knowing how to read” (*mu bu zhi shu* 目不知書).¹⁶ “A wastrel in his youth,” the *New History of the Five Dynasties* says, he “made a living by butchering cows, stealing donkeys, and pirating illegal salt, such that fellow villagers dubbed him Thief the Bastard” (少無賴, 以屠牛盜驢販私鹽為事, 裏人謂之賊王八).¹⁷ According to some other accounts, Wang Jian was once accused of robbery and arrested by the

FIGURE 2. Statue of Wang Jian.



local government of Xuzhou.¹⁸ Thus it is reasonable to believe that the laudatory account of his family background cited earlier is a fabrication. A probable quote from his *Veritable Records* (*shilu* 實錄) compiled by Former Shu historians after his accession, the story was intended to hide the ruler's obscure origin and shameful early deeds.¹⁹ Yet as will be seen later, his humble background did not block Wang Jian's road to success in the chaotic era of the late Tang, an opportune time for capable men of obscurity to rise as great heroes.

As one living on the fringes of a criminal world, Wang Jian can be seen as a representative of assorted "toughs" of the day—"individuals without regular occupations and with no part in the fabric of conventional society."²⁰ Usually mighty and bold, men from this group never feared to take risks in a time filled with not only strife but also opportunity. The character of Wang Jian can be seen in the early means by which he made a living—salt smuggling. Since the mid-eighth century, salt, a very profitable resource, had been under the monopoly of the Tang government, accounting for more than half of the state's revenue in some years. Facing mounting financial needs due to the punitive wars against unruly provinces, the Tang court often tried to increase its revenues by raising the price of the salt it strictly controlled, consequently stimulating private individuals to become illicit traders who undersold the government while selling salt to poor farmers. Understandably, the government had made efforts to eradicate this illegal trade. More than a dozen special patrol stations (*xunyuan* 巡院) were established across Henan—including one in the Chen-Xu region. Extremely severe laws were issued, ordering the death penalty for anyone found guilty of privately selling more than one picul (approximately 175 pounds) of salt.²¹ Given these harsh punishments, only audacious men dared to risk their lives in the illegal salt trade. Wang Jian was such a man. Understandably, in this risky profession unusually tight bonds of friendship formed among comrades, men with similar personalities who contributed greatly to Wang Jian's founding of his empire. No doubt Wang Jian, whose "strategy and valor handily surpassed those of his peers" (機略拳勇出於流輩), became a natural leader of his gangs.²²

Heroes are created by circumstances. The chaotic late Tang period opened the door of opportunity for Wang Jian. In the late 860s, when Wang Jian was in his early twenties, his native Chen-Xu area was swept up in a massive mutiny of frontier soldiers from a garrison in the far south. The rebels started from south China and fought and pillaged their way through the region of the middle and lower Yangzi and up to the borders of today's Henan, Shandong and Jiangsu provinces.²³ After the suppression of this rebellion, Henan suffered a succession of disastrous floods in 873 and a prolonged drought in 874. After the government failed to provide effective relief to the starving population, peasant uprisings and bandit looting spread quickly along the Yellow River. The largest peasant revolt was led by Wang Xianzhi 王仙芝 (d. 878) and later by Huang Chao 黃巢 (d. 884), both of whom had smuggled illegal salt, like Wang Jian. Their peasant armies developed fast and swept through the large area from central Henan to Canton in the south, causing unprecedented disorder across China.²⁴ Under these circumstances, the most common way for an ordinary man to change his life was to join an army, either following mobs of peasant rebels or becoming a member of an official army charged with suppressing the revolts. Nearly all of the rulers of the regional regimes in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties came from these two military groups.²⁵ Wang Jian was no exception.

At roughly twenty-eight years of age, Wang Jian decided to join the government army to pursue “a great change” in his life.²⁶ The reason why he chose to be a government soldier instead of a rebel was not due to loyal commitment to the imperial court. It was an unexpected encounter with a monk which caused him to make the choice. On a journey to trade illegal salt in northern Hubei, Wang Jian met a Buddhist master named Chuhong 處洪, who sparked Wang Jian's ambitious dream with the words: “You have such an extraordinary physiognomy; why not join the government army to search for a great change? [What a pity] to be a bandit of ill-repute” (子骨相甚貴，何不從軍，自求豹變，乃區區為盜，掇賊之號)!²⁷ Touched by the monk's words, Wang Jian returned home immediately and joined the local government forces. From then on, his

whole life was tightly bound to his military career. A great change was now on the horizon.

A ZHONGWU CAPTAIN

The seat of the Zhongwu Command 忠武軍 was Wang Jian's hometown, Xuzhou, where he became a private soldier of the Zhongwu army. The command was one of the most crucial garrisons in the central northern plains. It protected the capital region from the threats of intractable provinces in Hebei to the north and Shandong to the east. Like most other commands in the heartland of China, Zhongwu was established by the Tang court to suppress An Lushan's revolt during the mid-eighth century. The Chen-Xu region had been administered by military governors since the 750s, though the two prefectures belonged to different commands at first. A permanent command titled "Chen-Xu" was not established until 787, at first governing only two prefectures, before another two were added three decades later.²⁸ In 794, when emperor Dezong planned to restore imperial authority in the northeast, this small yet important command was renamed "Zhongwu," literally meaning "Loyal and Martial," to convey the expectations of the ambitious emperor.²⁹ Due to the location of Chen-Xu, the government staffed the command with men who were powerfully armed and loyal to the court to fight rebels. A formidable army was stationed there, mainly drafted from the local area. The size of the Zhongwu army was reputed to be thirty thousand men after Xianzong's suppression of a rebellion to the south of the command, and it might have tripled later.³⁰ From the mid-eighth to the late ninth century, the troops of the Zhongwu Command played an important role in pacifying the revolts of disobedient governors and bandits.³¹ As one source noted, "The army of Zhongwu is powerful; always serving as the vanguard before other troops, it has repeatedly achieved merit" (許師勁悍, 常為諸軍鋒, 故數立勳).³² In the 870s, the court had to summon it again to suppress the spreading peasant rebellion led by Wang Xianzhi and Huang Chao.

After joining the Zhongwu army, Wang Jian was soon promoted to be a lower-ranking officer (*liexiao* 列校) by the governor Du Shenquan

杜審權.³³ In the winter of 875, when Wang Xianzhi's rebels swarmed down to the north of Huainan (the current Anhui and Jiangsu provinces) and ravaged nearly a dozen prefectures along their way, the court decided to mobilize all the armies in the neighboring provinces, including Zhongwu, to quell the spreading revolt.³⁴ The Zhongwu army demonstrated its remarkable quality in the war. In the summer of 876, the court sent a direct order to urge the Zhongwu army to expel the rebels threatening an area west of Luoyang.³⁵ Under the leadership of its new governor Cui Anqian, the Zhongwu troops defeated the rebels several times, soon restoring the transportation of grain through the Bian River canal.³⁶ As a result, the rebels "did not dare to trespass on the domain of Zhongwu" (不敢犯其境).³⁷ Wang Jian might have joined these expeditions. From 876 to 878, he was sent out to Shandong and later to Jiangxi with the Zhongwu army. His performance in battle can be glimpsed in contemporary reports that his horse had died of exhaustion on the battlefield, as Wang Jian had been fighting too long without rest.³⁸

After Wang Xianzhi died in 878, Huang Chao and his rebels marched southwards. Two years later, when the rebels returned to the north, no more effective defense could be organized by the powerless court because most military governors preferred to preserve their strength for personal interests and few wholeheartedly answered the call of the central government. Even worse, some provinces faced their own internal crises during this critical time. The Zhongwu Command suffered a disastrous mutiny in which the officially appointed governor was murdered, and a general named Zhou Ji 周岌 (d. 882) came to power, later obtaining official recognition from the court.³⁹ Further, one of Zhongwu's prefectures, Caizhou 蔡州 (today's Runan of Henan province), was occupied by Qin Zongquan 秦宗權 (d. 889), an ambitious man who became a powerful warlord in Henan several years later.⁴⁰ Perhaps disappointed by the chaotic situation in Zhongwu, Wang Jian joined Qin Zongquan's mercenary army in search of opportunities. There he was promoted to be Provost Marshal (Junyuhou 軍虞候), an important position responsible for military discipline.⁴¹

In the winter of 880, the situation confronting the Tang government deteriorated further. The rebels defeated the imperial armies and marched

towards Guanzhong, forcing the emperor to flee to Shu. In the years that followed, the exiled Tang court made great efforts to mobilize local troops to suppress the rebels in the capital area. The famous Zhongwu army demonstrated its extraordinary capacities again.

In 881, an influential eunuch named Yang Fuguang 楊複光 (843–884), the Army Supervisor (Jianjun 監軍) of Zhongwu, started to organize an expeditionary army. He acquired troops from Zhou Ji and Qin Zongquan, and Wang Jian was on the list of the latter's expeditionary troops.⁴² Yang divided the veteran Zhongwu soldiers into eight brigades, each consisting of a thousand men under the command of a captain. Wang Jian was assigned to head one brigade, as were his friends Jin Hui 晉暉 and Li Shitai 李師泰, both of whom hailed from Xuzhou.⁴³ Wang Jian's unit, named "Yiyong 義勇" (Righteous and Brave), was a formidable army that later became the core of his expanded Shu army and contributed greatly to his military success.⁴⁴ Starting in 881, the Eight Brigades of Zhongwu (Zhongwu badu 忠武八都) joined a series of campaigns to besiege rebels around Chang'an, until the loyal eunuch died in the summer of 883, two months after Huang Chao was expelled and the capital was recaptured.⁴⁵

The death of Yang Fuguang greatly diminished the morale of the Zhongwu soldiers. They had no interest in fighting for an exiled emperor in a land far from their native place. Led by a senior general, Lu Yanhong 鹿晏弘 (d. 885), the Zhongwu army retreated from Chang'an and headed southwest, ostensibly to meet the emperor in Shu. En route, they looted every prefecture like bandits. In late 883, this army arrived at Xingyuan, where Lu Yanhong drove off the governor of Shannan West and assumed the title himself.⁴⁶

As the critical year 884 arrived, both the national situation and the circumstances at Xingyuan forced Wang Jian to make a decision that would change the course of his life. The pacification of the Huang Chao rebellion permitted the emperor's return to the capital through Xingyuan, which Zhongwu troops had occupied. Wang Jian was worried that the court would not pardon the Zhongwu army for its misconduct. Within Xingyuan, the tense relationship between the arrogant Lu Yanhong and

other officers generated more anxiety. After occupying Xingyuan, Lu rewarded Wang Jian and other generals with appointments as prefects, but did not allow them to go to their assigned posts, demonstrating clear distrust.⁴⁷ “Misfortune is coming soon and it is better to act for our own sake” (禍難無日矣，早宜擇利而行), Wang Jian secretly warned his fellows, who shared similar concerns about Lu’s ambition to annex their brigades. Soon a consensus was reached among the generals, who decided to meet the Tang emperor in the southwest to secure “a good reputation” (*meiming* 美名).⁴⁸ Coincidentally, at this time they received a secret letter from Tian Lingzi, encouraging the Zhongwu officers to join the imperial army.⁴⁹ As a result, Wang Jian and four other officers—Han Jian 韓建 (855–912), Zhang Zao 張造, Jin Hui, and Li Shitai—abandoned Lu Yanhong, and led about three thousand troops to the west to greet the emperor on his way from Chengdu and rally to his defense.⁵⁰

A GENERAL OF THE IMPERIAL ARMY

The momentous meeting of Xizong and the Zhongwu troops did not prevent the Tang empire from falling, but for Wang Jian and his fellows, the encounter thoroughly transformed their personal lives. Besides receiving bountiful rewards, the five captains were promoted, and their troops were renamed the “Five Brigades Attending the Royal Entourage” (*Suijia wu du* 隨駕五都), responsible for protecting the emperor on his journey to Chang’an. Meanwhile, the five officers were adopted by the powerful Tian Lingzi as his foster sons.⁵¹ Compared to Wang Jian, Lu Yanhong at Xingyuan suffered a pathetic fate. Under attack from the imperial armies, the rebellious general and his remnant troops fled eastward to their hometown, the Chen-Xu region, where Lu was murdered by Qin Zongquan the next year.⁵² Wang Jian’s flight proved a wise decision.

In the late spring of 885, Xizong arrived in Chang’an, which by that time had been severely damaged by the war. The emperor inaugurated a new reign name, “Guangqi 光啓” (Luminous Beginning), hoping to rejuvenate the weak court, which at that time controlled only several dozen prefectures across the empire.⁵³ But a new crisis soon dashed the

emperor's hopes. It was caused by the longstanding tension between provincial governors and the dominant eunuch, Tian Lingzi. Confronted by the threat of hostile governors, especially those in proximity to the capital, Tian strengthened the imperial forces under his command.⁵⁴ To meet the pressing financial demands caused by his military expansion, the eunuch attempted to gain the right to oversee the salt monopoly in Hezhong 河中, a command in southwestern Shanxi province, where the governor Wang Chongrong 王重榮 (d. 887) had dominated since 880.⁵⁵ A military conflict could not be avoided. Even worse, the Shatuo 沙陀 troops led by Li Keyong 李克用 (856–908) had now joined the alliance with Wang Chongrong, marching southward to Chang'an. The defeat of the imperial forces compelled the emperor to flee for a second time. Chased closely by the pursuing army, the emperor and his entourage ran in panic to the western border of Shaanxi.⁵⁶ Their planned escape route was obvious: following the northern part of the official Postal Road (Yidao) from Fengxiang 鳳翔 to Fengzhou 鳳州 (today's Fengxian of Shaanxi province), they could shift to the Bao-Xie Road in the direction of the Hanzhong area, the same route as Xuanzong's during the An Lushan Rebellion more than one century earlier.⁵⁷ But this route was hardly easy. The roads along the steep Qinling Mountain were dangerous because most major sections were built with wooden trestles connecting precipitous cliffs, with surging torrents of rivers and streams below.

Wang Jian demonstrated his extraordinary loyalty and won the emperor's heart over the course of this journey. Having been promoted to general of the imperial army earlier in the year, he was effectively in charge of Xizong's personal safety.⁵⁸ Wang Jian fulfilled his mission. Not far west of Fengxiang, Wang Jian took personal responsibility for clearing the road, deploying five hundred palace guards with long swords to remove thorns on the road and carve out a passage for the emperor's carriage. He was so trusted that Xizong even let him carry the imperial regalia. When they arrived at a small post in front of the San Pass 散關, west of Fengxiang, the road became worse: a section of the road constructed with wood, conventionally known as *zhandao* 棧道

(wooden trestle path), had been set on fire by rebels to halt the emperor's progress.⁵⁹ At this critical time, Wang Jian led Xizong by hand, carefully assisting the sovereign across the shaking wooden trestles, which nearly fell. That night the exhausted emperor napped with his head on Wang Jian's lap. After waking up, the sentimental emperor could not help weeping, fearful of the hardship and stirred by the loyalty of his general. Then Xizong removed the robe covered with his tears and bestowed it on Wang Jian as a reward for his loyal service.⁶⁰

The shift to the Bao-Xie Road to Shannan West did not improve the journey of the exiled court. Rebels had burned all the major sections of the road, forcing the emperor to take a winding and arduous bypath across the mountains.⁶¹ Several days later, Xizong arrived safely at Xingyuan with the most serious external dangers temporarily subsided. Then, the impeachment of Tian Lingzi was proposed by officials, who accused the eunuch of causing this three-month exile. Calls for his impeachment were echoed by the governors involved in the crisis, and they urged the emperor to execute the eunuch. As a result, the emperor appointed another influential eunuch, Yang Fugong 楊復恭 (d. 894), a major rival of Tian at court, to command the military.⁶² Facing opposition both at the court and from the provinces, Tian Lingzi resigned all offices and sought refuge in Shu in the early summer of 886. There, under his brother's protection, the eunuch escaped punishment one year later, when the court attempted to send him into exile.⁶³

The power transition at the court affected Wang Jian. In early 886, when the emperor entered Xingyuan, Wang Jian and two of his comrades, Jin Hui and Zhang Zao, were dispatched to reconstruct the roads destroyed by the rebels.⁶⁴ Understandably, due to their bonds of adoption to Tian Lingzi, Wang Jian and his fellow generals were seen by Yang Fugong as potential threats to his authority in the imperial forces. Therefore, they were all dismissed and sent out to be local officials. Wang Jian left the imperial army, taking his Zhongwu troops to his new post, Lizhou 利州 (today's Guangyuan of Sichuan province).⁶⁵ A new life and a new fortune awaited him.

A MILITARY COMMISSIONER

Lizhou was neither sizable nor productive. But its location was significant for military purposes. The torrential Jialing River ran through it from the northwest to the southeast, and several major roads to Shu converged there. Lizhou was known in Tang times as a place that “connects the areas in the four directions and leads to the five regions” (*si hui wu da* 四會五達). To the northeast, the Gold Bull Road 金牛道 led to Xingyuan, where people could reach Xingzhou 興州 (today’s Lueyang of Shaanxi province) and Fengzhou by the official Post Road or could reach Fengzhou directly by the Bao-Xie Road through the Qinling mountains; both roads ultimately led to the Guanzhong Plain. To the southwest, the southern section of the Gold Bull Road ran through the dangerous Sword Gate Pass in north Sichuan, leading to the Chengdu Plain. To the northwest, the tributaries of the Jialing River joined the southern Long 隴 area (southern Gansu). Directly to the south, the Jialing River extended southward to eastern Shu, where it eventually joined the upper Yangzi River.⁶⁶

Such a strategic prefecture, however, did not appeal to Wang Jian, who at that time had neither stable finances nor sufficient forces. Thus Lizhou was not an ideal place to stay, not only because its strategic location invited invasions from neighboring warlords but also because its convenient locale made it very hard to defend. At this moment, Zhou Xiang 周庠 (also known as Zhou Boya 博雅, 855?–920?), a former civil official of the Tang, pointed out these dangers to Wang Jian. Hailing from Xuzhou as well, Zhou had been trapped at Lizhou by the ongoing war. Upon learning that Wang Jian was stationed nearby, he went directly to the general’s camp and offered his advice. It was the first time that Wang Jian, an illiterate military man, had spoken so intimately with a knowledgeable scholar. The general became enlightened and made Zhou Xiang his advisor.⁶⁷ Under Zhou Xiang’s direction, Wang Jian decided to take advantage of this chaotic age to reach loftier goals. A plan for military expansion was made. His first target was Langzhou 閬州 (today’s Langzhong of Sichuan province) to the south in the lower Jialing area, a

prefecture described by Zhou Xiang as a place “with a dangerous landscape and brave people” (*di xian min hao* 地險民豪).⁶⁸ The immediate goal for this military action, in Zhou’s words, was to “capture its land to gain strategic advantage and obtain its men to augment our armies” (得其地以廣形勝, 得其士以增卒伍).⁶⁹

Around this time, emperor Xizong had left Xingyuan for the capital. Yang Shouliang 楊守亮 (d. 892), a family member of Yang Fugong, was appointed governor of Shannan West.⁷⁰ Afraid of the valiant Wang Jian and his Zhongwu army stationed in strategic Lizhou, Yang Shouliang summoned Wang Jian to Xingyuan. This suspicious request caused Wang Jian to worry. In the spring of 887, he acted preemptively. After expanding his army by recruiting people from local tribes, Wang Jian marched southward along the Jialing River and seized Langzhou. Afterwards, looting along the border between Shannan West and East Chuan, he totally severed connections with his nominal supervisor, Yang Shouliang.⁷¹

Zhou Xiang further analyzed the contemporary political situation for Wang Jian: the Tang court would inevitably collapse in an age when independent governors across the country were eager to expand their territories by force, and the conquest and annexation of the weaker by the stronger would become the norm. Appreciating this maxim, Wang Jian became concerned about amassing a powerful military force. A large number of soldiers were recruited among fugitives and landless peasants in the neighborhood, an ideal reservoir of brave warriors like the “tribal men” he had recruited from Lizhou.⁷² Besides Zhou Xiang, two other subordinates from Xuzhou also contributed to Wang Jian’s development at this stage. Zhang Qianyu 張虔裕 suggested that Wang Jian send a memorial to the emperor to express his “loyalty,” a symbolic gesture that would cost nothing but gain legitimacy for his military actions in the future. Another man named Qiwu Jian 綦毋諫 persuaded Wang Jian to treat the locals benevolently and recruit more literati as advisors, the historically proven way for overlords to win in times of tumult. If Wang Jian could follow this advice, the advisors said, he only needed to “observe the changes in the world” (*guan tianxia zhi bian* 觀天下之變) and wait for an opportunity to assert himself.⁷³

AN INTRUDER TO SHU

The opportunity came soon. In the winter of 887, Wang Jian received an unexpected letter from Tian Lingzi, his foster father, inviting him to Chengdu. "Compared to the tumultuous Central Plains," Tian stated in the letter, "the Three Circuits of Shu are the only region where peace can be found, while Governor Chen is generous and trustful. By aiding him, we, as father and son, can build a great enterprise together. Nothing is impossible" (中原多故，惟三蜀可以偷安，陳公恢廓無疑，同建大事，吾父子輔之，無不可也).⁷⁴ Inspired by the words, Wang Jian led his expanded army southwestward to Chengdu.

The situation in the inner Shu at this time, however, was not as simple as Wang Jian had expected. The West Chuan governor Chen Jingxuan still exerted tight control over his domain. During his tenure, the corrupt Chen only paid attention to his extravagant life in Chengdu. By one account, he set up lavish banquets six times a month, with dishes that cost tremendous sums.⁷⁵ To exploit the locals, he organized a group of soldiers known as "Agents for Inquiring into Affairs" (*xunshiren* 尋事人), who were authorized to collect treasure from local officials and residents.⁷⁶ Yet under the protection of his brother at court, the corrupt Chen Jingxuan enjoyed great imperial favor. Xizong bestowed numerous esteemed official titles on him, as well as an iron writ of immunity for up to ten capital offenses, an extraordinary honor in the Tang dynasty.⁷⁷

Not surprisingly, the stability of West Chuan did not last long under the rule of Chen Jingxuan. In the early 880s, when Xizong's exiled court was still in Chengdu, a mutiny broke out within the city walls. It was followed by a massive revolt at Qiongzhou 邛州 (today's Qionglai of Sichuan province) and Yazhou 雅州 (today's Ya'an of Sichuan province), soon echoed by another rebellion in East Chuan, where the rebels blocked transportation routes along the upper Yangzi River.⁷⁸ After the pacification of these revolts, a military conflict erupted between Chen Jingxuan and Yang Shili 楊師立 (d. 884), the governor of East Chuan. Yang was defeated in 884 and replaced by one of Chen's generals, Gao Renhou 高仁厚, who was murdered by the suspicious Chen Jingxuan two years later.⁷⁹ Around the

time that Tian Lingzi joined his brother in West Chuan, the court appointed a general named Gu Yanlang 顧彥朗 (d. 891) as the new governor of East Chuan. Gu's appointment no doubt caused a lot of anxiety for Chen Jingxuan and his downcast eunuch brother. The seeds of enmity between the two circuits of Chuan were already planted by the day Gu Yanlang first entered Shu in early 887, as Chen Jingxuan attempted to block Gu's road through Sword Gate, the entrance to the inner Shu.⁸⁰ Under these circumstances, the sudden rise of Wang Jian at Lizhou and Langzhou, and especially his friendly relationship with Gu Yanlang, his old colleague in the imperial army, worried the Chen-Tian brothers even more.⁸¹ Fearing an alliance between Wang and Gu, Tian Lingzi decided to invite Wang Jian to Chengdu, hoping to recruit the capable man for his own use.

As Wang Jian marched towards Chengdu, the Chen-Tian brothers disagreed over the implications of Wang Jian's arrival. Tian Lingzi held the strong belief that his adopted son, Wang Jian, was merely a simple military man "without any cunning calculation" (*wu ta chang* 無他腸), and thus could be easily manipulated.⁸² But in the eyes of the suspicious Chen Jingxuan, the capable general was a potential danger. As Wang Jian's troops approached the Lutou Pass 鹿頭關, a stronghold sixty miles north of Chengdu, Chen Jingxuan decided to forbid Wang Jian to move further. Obviously Chen was persuaded by an advisor, who warned, "An ambitious hero nowadays, Wang Jian, like a wolf, has been looking for opportunities for a long while. He will never be satisfied being subordinate to others" (建今之奸雄，狼顧久矣，必不為人下).⁸³

But it was too late to stop the "wolf-like" aggression of Wang Jian. When he learned that Chen Jingxuan had broken his promise, the general flew into a rage, commanding his troops to break through the Lutou Pass right away. In the next few days, Wang Jian's army defeated the forces of resistance to the west of the pass and conquered Hanzhou 漢州 (today's Guanghan of Sichuan province) in the south. Attempting to further weaken his enemy, Gu Yanlang sent an army from East Chuan to join Wang Jian. Their joint forces, reportedly fifty-thousand strong, achieved a series of victories and moved the front line to the suburbs of Chengdu in early 888.⁸⁴

Beginning February 5, 888, a savage three-day battle was waged along the outer walls of Chengdu, ending with a temporary retreat of the joint armies of Wang-Gu to Hanzhou. A second siege of Chengdu was launched a few weeks later. The city was attacked from three directions in a brutal campaign lasting nearly three months.⁸⁵ That summer, the major battlefield moved to Pengzhou 彭州 (today's Pengxian of Sichuan province), where a seesaw battle inflicted heavy losses on both sides. In the days that followed, the turbulence caused by Wang Jian's intrusion soon spread throughout the whole region of West Chuan.⁸⁶

Because of the resistance of Chen Jingxuan, the war entered a long stalemate, which started to frustrate Wang Jian, who had underestimated the military strength of Chen Jingxuan and expected a quick victory. With insufficient provisions, Wang Jian considered a withdrawal. At this pivotal moment, Zhou Xiang helped him regain his confidence with the words: "Victory or defeat is unpredictable for men of war; few rulers of antiquity...could expect to achieve hegemony with a single battle" (兵家勝負無常，古者出師。。。。。豈有一戰而霸者).⁸⁷ Zhou further rallied Wang Jian to occupy the productive Qiongzhou as a base for this protracted war. Inspired by Zhou's soul-stirring words and wise strategy, Wang Jian changed his mind and determined to fight for a final victory.

Other strategic actions followed. Wang Jian submitted a petition to the court, urging the emperor to appoint a new governor to West Chuan and launch a punitive attack against Chen Jingxuan. His purpose was obvious: by attributing all crimes to his enemy, Wang Jian would justify his own military actions, which had actually brought the disorder to Shu. Then he could attack Chengdu with a legitimate excuse. "Unless we rely on the authority of the throne," Wang Jian once said to his subordinates, "we will easily lose the hearts of the people" (不倚天子之重，則眾心易離).⁸⁸ An official representative from the central government was also vital, as Wang Jian realized at that time. "Without a court-appointed commander, people would say that I am pursuing benefit for myself." (若無受鉞之將，必謂自圖其利).⁸⁹ Coincidentally, Gu Yanlang sent a similar request to the court at the same time. He also tactfully petitioned

the court to confer governorship on Wang Jian, a deliberate gesture to show friendship to the formidable ally.⁹⁰

Their requests were soon approved by the new court. Emperor Xizong had died of a sudden illness in early 888. His younger brother, known as Zhaozong 昭宗 (r. 888–904), succeeded with the support of Yang Fugong. The new emperor was said to have had a bad relationship with Tian Lingzi in the days when the latter dominated court.⁹¹ Now turbulence in Shu provided Zhaozong and Yang Fugong a good chance to get rid of their hated enemy. In the late summer of 888, the court appointed Wei Zhaodu 韋昭度 (d. 895), one of the chief ministers, as the new governor of West Chuan.⁹² A few months later, Wang Jian was appointed governor of the Yongping Command 永平軍, a new province carved out of West Chuan that included four prefectures west of Chengdu.⁹³ Perhaps in the eyes of Zhaozong, such a generous award cost the court nothing because all the prefectures under this new command were still controlled by Chen Jingxuan. The only way for Wang Jian to win his own domain would be to help the government defeat Chen Jingxuan and restore peace to Shu. But as events revealed, Wang Jian's ambitions and abilities were far beyond the imagination of the court. He would not settle for the small domain of Yongping, but for all of Shu.

A MILITARY GOVERNOR

When Wei Zhaodu entered Shu in 888, news came from Chengdu that Chen Jingxuan had refused to be replaced.⁹⁴ A “rejection of the imperial order of replacement” (*bu shou dai* 不受代) was seen as an act of overt rebellion during Tang times. For the central government, only two options were left: either acquiesce to Chen's autonomy, or suppress the governor by force. Admittedly, during the late Tang period, it was very common for entrenched regional governors to scorn imperial edicts and refuse to be transferred or replaced, as shown in the case of Wang Chongrong of Hezhong three years before. Thus, Chen Jingxuan's behavior was hardly a surprise, but it was still unusual for a province in Shu, the traditional sanctuary for Tang emperors, a region that had remained

compliant for the past five years. The court chose to solve the problem by force, authorizing Wei Zhaodu to attack Chengdu with the aid of three neighboring governors: Gu Yanlang of East Chuan, Yang Shouliang of Shannan West, and Wang Jian, the nominal governor of Yongping.⁹⁵

The allied army besieged Chengdu again. But the siege this time was obviously different from the one led previously by Wang Jian. First of all, imperial sanction lent the campaign an indisputable legitimacy. Moreover, the military action was led by a civilian official of aristocratic background, Wei Zhaodu, whose official aides and headquarters personnel were descended from elite families—none of them were really able to fight. By one account, the timid Wei Zhaodu feared the stones and arrows of war so much that he refused to approach the walls of Chengdu, then a battle site.⁹⁶ Not surprisingly, as a junior governor with neither elite origin nor prestige at court, Wang Jian was assigned to manage the actual affairs of war.

Such a civil-military imbalance inevitably generated serious discord in the allied army. It is said that Wang Jian was despised by Wei Zhaodu's staff, a group of civil officials hailing from aristocratic clans. Even the general's unsightly facial features and dirty uniform became objects of ridicule for them: his tangled hair, tattooed face, and bound wristbands made him seem as "horrifying" (*jingsu* 兢肅) as a ghost.⁹⁷ Still, Wang Jian served Wei Zhaodu "with utmost circumspection" (*shen jin* 甚謹).⁹⁸ This reflects the extraordinary endurance of Wang Jian, who clearly understood that the presence of Wei Zhaodu lent legitimacy to the war. Thus the general controlled his anger, quietly waiting for the time to take revenge.

On the battlefield, of course, it was Wang Jian and his soldiers who actually determined the direction of the punitive campaign. After a series of victories in the suburbs of Chengdu, Wang Jian triumphed in a neighboring county again in early 889, defeating a major Shu force led by the seasoned Shan Xingzhang 山行章 (d. 897).⁹⁹ One year later, Shan was thoroughly vanquished south of Chengdu and surrendered to Wang Jian.¹⁰⁰ Yet the vigorous defense of Chengdu made it hard for the allied army to capture the capital city. Wang Jian decided to occupy the west

and south of West Chuan, aiming to interdict Chen Jingxuan's military aid and food supplies from other prefectures. In early 890, Wang Jian himself led an army to attack Qiongzhou, as Zhou Xiang had earlier suggested. There, another prominent Shu general, Yang Ru 楊儒, surrendered.¹⁰¹ A domino effect was set in motion. In the same year, eight prefectures to the south and west of Chengdu capitulated, one after another. On October 26, the last defenders at Qiongzhou surrendered. Ten days later, Wang Jian, raising his governor's banner and the seal bestowed by the court, entered the gate of Qiongzhou, formally taking over the base prefecture of his Yongping Command.¹⁰²

Thus, from late 890 onwards, the long lasting stalemate in the campaign had been broken, and Wang Jian gained the upper hand. By this time he had occupied nine out of the twelve prefectures of West Chuan. A military and financial base was established at Qiongzhou, where Wang Jian appointed a trusted assistant to repair the city walls, appease the local minorities, and collect resources from the productive area. In the winter of 890, when Wang Jian returned to the front outside of Chengdu, he confronted a very different situation: a famine caused by the long siege was affecting both the rebels and the allied troops. The crisis afforded Wang Jian further opportunity.

Inside the city, the shortage of provisions made Chen Jingxuan frantic. He had made every effort to meet military needs by exploiting the residents of Chengdu. He established a special organization, the "Agency for Supervising Tax Assessments" (Zhengduyuan 征督院), to collect taxes by force, and issued a series of harsh laws to maintain his authority in the isolated city. Some officials and commoners, accused of "scheming to surrender," were executed in public by the governor to suppress the spreading unrest throughout the city, where hundreds of residents had died of starvation.¹⁰³ The situation was not promising outside the city, either. The emperor Zhaozong gradually lost patience with this protracted war and the provisions for the large number of allied troops had proven a heavy burden on the court. Without seeing any sign of victory, Zhaozong issued an edict of truce in the spring of 891 requiring Gu Yanlang and Wang Jian to return to their own territories and, as a

compromise, he ordered the return to Chen Jingxuan of all offices that had been taken away earlier.¹⁰⁴ Understandably, Wang Jian would not accept this order to give up the lands he had conquered. Now it was time to regain leadership.

Advised by Zhou Xiang, Wang Jian said to the commander-in-chief, Wei Zhaodu:

公以數萬之眾，困兩川之人，而師久無功，奈何？且唐室多故，東方諸鎮，兵接都畿，公當歸天子，靜中原以固根本，此蠻夷之國，不足以留公！

You, Sir, with a legion of several tens of thousands, have long pressed warriors of the two Chuan commands with no success. And to what end? The Tang dynasty is beset with countless problems, as governors in the east extend military conflict westward to the capital. You should return to the court to fortify the empire's foundation by restoring order to the Central Plains. This barbaric frontier is unworthy of your noble presence.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, Wang Jian was attempting to persuade Wei to quit and delegate leadership to him. If the words quoted here were not convincing enough, a scheme designed by Wang Jian did the job. One day, a group of soldiers kidnapped an attendant of Wei, accusing the man of stealing food from the military granary and cannabilizing him right before the gate of the commander's camp.¹⁰⁶ The cowardly Wei Zhaodu was so terrified that, under the pretext of a sudden illness, he assigned all powers to Wang Jian and fled Shu.

Wang Jian used the Shudao to further secure his leadership. Immediately after Wei left Shu, Wang Jian sent an army to close off the pass. Such an action clearly shows his ambition to occupy the entire Shu. The tactic of using the strategic Shudao to isolate Shu from the outside, especially from the central government in the north, was employed frequently in history. The precedent can be seen in the actions of Liu Yan 劉焉 (d. 194) in the late Han, a governor who maintained authority in inner Shu by blocking the Bao-Xie Road.¹⁰⁷ Wang Jian's strategy worked just as effectively: not a single soldier from the court could enter

Shu again. “If I block Sword Gate Pass with troops, the court can never intervene in my business” (以兵塞劍門，朝廷謂我何), Wang Jian once boasted to his advisors.¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, Wang Jian still paid lip service to the court, trying to maintain the legitimacy of his military actions. In a memorial to Zhaozong, he condemned the crimes of Chen Jingxuan and Tian Lingzi, claiming that he was taking responsibility for uprooting evil on the court’s behalf. Facing this situation, Zhaozong had no choice but to officially recognize Wang Jian’s replacement of the fleeing Wei Zhaodu.¹⁰⁹ Later on, the court could do nothing but watch as Wang Jian continued his campaign to seize the Shu region.

Now it was time for Wang Jian to focus on Chengdu. Along with direct military assaults on the city, more effective strategies were embraced at the same time. First, Wang Jian enormously boosted the morale of his men enormously by promising the warriors that they would be allowed to claim women and wealth once Chengdu fell. He also sent a spy to Chengdu to spread rumors of panic across the city. One of Wang Jian’s generals pretended to surrender to Chen Jingxuan, but soon returned with detailed information on the military defenses of Chengdu. By the summer of 891, the fall of Chengdu was just a matter of time. Wang Jian had occupied all the neighboring counties around the city, cutting off supply lines from the north. In contrast to Wang Jian’s men, the morale of the Shu troops dropped to its nadir, with nobody responding to Chen Jingxuan’s commands.¹¹⁰

On September 30, 891, Chen Jingxuan and Tian Lingzi finally made the decision to surrender. On that morning, the despairing Tian Lingzi climbed the city wall and talked face to face with Wang Jian, his former foster son. When the eunuch reprimanded Wang Jian for forgetting their previous relationship, Wang Jian answered, “The kindness of Mr. Inspector is akin to father and son, something scarcely to disappear from my heart. At the behest of the Son of Heaven, however, I take military reprisal against a man who refuses to be replaced” (軍容父子之恩，心何可忘，然兵討不受代者，天子命也).¹¹¹ That night, the gate of Chengdu was opened, and Tian Lingzi came to Wang Jian’s camp, submitting the governor’s seal to his son. Wang Jian accepted it, with tears on his face,

promising to treat his foster father well. This promise did not last long. Two years later, after Wang Jian had consolidated his power in Chengdu, he ordered the execution of Chen and Tian with no hesitation.¹¹²

The conquest of Chengdu in 891 marked a tremendous success for Wang Jian. From then on, he ruled a sizeable and wealthy domain and held a status equal to that of other powerful military governors in the country. He accomplished a miracle by changing his fortunes from those of a donkey thief, salt smuggler, and private soldier to those of an august governor of Tang in the span of fifteen years.

Of course, he was not alone. If one looks at the history of the last decade of the ninth century, the Tang empire was in a state of constant flux. In the wake of the Huang Chao rebellion, the distribution of power at the provincial level had changed frequently and dramatically. By 891, precisely the time that Wang Jian struggled for control of West Chuan, over half of the governors of 885 had been overthrown and replaced.¹¹³ The turbulent times had entailed both dangers and opportunities. Numerous earlier pretenders disappeared from the historical stage, either annexed by other mighty governors or replaced by new faces like Wang Jian. In the ensuing decade, the complicated mosaic of local violence gradually evolved into a simpler pattern of conflict among a small number of warlords. Wang Jian was one of them. In the early winter of 891, two months after he entered Chengdu, Wang Jian obtained official recognition as governor of West Chuan from the court. His competition with neighboring rivals was beginning.

A UNIFIER OF THREE CIRCUITS

After seizing West Chuan, Wang Jian began to consider the next step, the unification of the entire Shu. The road to unification, however, was full of obstacles. First, his authority in the lands he had just seized in West Chuan was not stable and he needed more time to consolidate it. He needed to incorporate large numbers of turncoat generals, officials, and soldiers who had been commanded by Chen Jingxuan for a long time. Problems also came from his own men. At the beginning of the

conquest, he had to work hard to restore order in Chengdu by strengthening the discipline among his troops. More challenges came from powerful rivals in neighboring areas. Pengzhou, an important prefecture of West Chuan, less than thirty miles north of Chengdu, was still in the hands of a loyalist of Tian Lingzi. To the east, Gu Yanhui 顧彥暉 (d. 897) had just succeeded his brother Yanlang as ruler of the area of East Chuan centered in Zizhou. To the northeast, from Mianzhou 綿州 to Xingyuan, a strategic area holding the important Shudao had been occupied for years by Yang Shouliang and his foster brothers, all supported by their foster father Yang Fugong. In addition, several ambitious governors beyond Shu also showed interest in this wealthy land, threatening to join the competition at any time. For example, the governor of Jingnan, a command seated between Sichuan and Hubei provinces along the upper Yangzi, had extended his influence up to the gorge region on the eastern edge of East Chuan, presumably to counter Wang Jian's expanding might to the east. Another important contender for power was Li Maozhen 李茂貞 (856–924), then governor of Fengxiang and the most powerful warlord around Chang'an, who soon became a major impediment to Wang Jian's unification.¹¹⁴

The court of Zhaozong in Chang'an was another influential factor in the regional politics of Shu. Though without any actual ability to intervene in military struggles, the Tang court still exerted some influence by issuing edicts and served as a source of legitimacy. Not surprisingly, incidents related to the emperor usually became excuses invoked by regional warlords to initiate war. The attitude of the court toward a governor could sometimes alter his fortunes, in positive as well as negative ways. The story of Wang Jian's success clearly illustrates the role played by the imperial court. In fact, Wang Jian's conquest of East Chuan was precipitated by a sudden change at the court. In the summer of 891, at roughly the same time that Wang Jian entered Chengdu, the emperor dismissed the powerful eunuch Yang Fugong. Two months later, the eunuch planned a coup to overthrow Zhaozong. After the scheme was aborted, the frustrated eunuch fled with his confederates to Xingyuan, where his foster son Yang Shouliang governed.¹¹⁵ At the end of the year, the Yang confederates

ambushed an imperial envoy heading for Shu and invaded East Chuan. This incident subsequently invited Wang Jian's intervention.

Starting with this military action, Wang Jian launched his prolonged campaign to unify the Three Chuan. Over the next ten years he successfully pacified Pengzhou, seized East Chuan and conquered Xingyuan. By extending the northern borders of his domain up to the southern edge of the Qinling Mountain, he laid the foundation for his future contention with the mighty warlords of the Central Plains.

CONTENDING FOR EAST CHUAN

The Circuit of East Chuan during the Tang dynasty covered two distinctive regions: the western section straddled the Chengdu Plains, where the prefectural seat, Zizhou, was located; the eastern section consisted of the mountainous area of what is today Chongqing, through which the Yangzi River runs in the direction of Hubei, connecting the vast midwest of China with the Shu. Though not as wealthy and populous as its counterpart, West Chuan, its strategic location played an important role during the Tang period. Providing a passage through which the central government could easily penetrate into the inner Shu in times of disorder, East Chuan proved helpful to the Tang court in maintaining the political stability of southwest China, as seen in the pacification of the Liu Pi rebellion in 806.¹¹⁶ The water routes connecting the Chengdu Plains to the middle and lower Yangzi regions to the east, and to the Central Plains to the north, not only facilitated communications during peaceful times but also helped the exiled court in Chengdu survive hard times by transporting supplies from southeast China. In an incident in 883, when the routes through the gorges in the upper Yangzi were obstructed by rebels, the entire inner Shu suffered a great shortage of salt and other commodities.¹¹⁷

During most of the Tang dynasty, East Chuan was under the court's effective control, and this situation lasted until the fall of 891, when the death of Gu Yanlang set in motion a fierce competition for this territory. When Gu Yanlang's younger brother Yanhui inherited the governorship, Wang Jian immediately showed his interest in the province to

the west.¹¹⁸ Conceivably, if the elder Gu had still been alive, Wang Jian might not have implemented his plan due to their longtime friendship.¹¹⁹ But Wang Jian would not spare the younger Gu, who had joined other civilian officials of noble backgrounds in Wei Zhaodu's headquarters to deride Wang Jian three years ago.¹²⁰ Now, his moment had come.

At the end of 891, the court dispatched an envoy to East Chuan with the governor's banner and seal to officially recognize Gu Yanhui's succession. Before the envoy arrived at Zizhou, he was kidnapped by Yang Shouhou 楊守厚 (d. 892), prefect of Mianzhou and brother of Yang Shouliang. Yang Shouhou then attacked Zizhou, causing Gu Yanhui to beg for rescue from Wang Jian.¹²¹ For the ambitious Wang Jian, the moment seemed opportune to annex the neighbor. On January 30, 892, Wang Jian summoned four generals and gave them a mission to "lend assistance to" East Chuan. They also received a secret order: after defeating Yang Shouhou, they should capture Gu Yanhui and seize his domain. This, Wang Jian confirmed, would "spare me the trouble of a second mission" (無煩吾再舉也).¹²²

The rescue was successful. The troops from Chengdu easily smashed the invaders, compelling Yang Shouhou to retreat and release the imperial envoy. But in the eyes of Wang Jian, this military action was hardly a victory. He expected his generals to capture Gu Yanhui during the celebratory banquet that followed the victory. But it turned out that the prudent governor, seemingly aware of Wang Jian's scheme, absented himself from the event on the pretext of illness.¹²³ Wang Jian's aborted attempt to seize East Chuan left an obvious rift between the two circuits. After that, Wang Jian began to prepare for direct military attacks against his neighbor.

The situation was complicated soon by a new contender. In the fall of 892, Li Maozhen, governor of Fengxiang, expanded his influence into northern Shu by seizing Xingyuan from the hands of Yang Shouliang.¹²⁴ His emergence stymied Wang Jian's unification plan. Unlike Yang Shouliang and his incompetent foster brothers, who had lost legitimacy with the downfall of Yang Fugong, Li Maozhen had many advantages. Once a seasoned general in the imperial Shence Army, Li proved his competence during Xizong's flight to Xingyuan in 886, winning a

governorship and receiving the imperial surname. His power expanded quickly after his transfer to Fengxiang in 887, where he built a formidable army, set up an alliance with another influential governor in Guanzhong, and exerted great influence at court.¹²⁵ After conquering Xingyuan, Li Maozhen quickly established an alliance with Gu Yanhui, taking advantage of the latter's concern about Wang Jian's expansion. A war between the two sides could not be avoided.

The Li-Gu alliance forced Wang Jian to organize a series of military campaigns. First, he launched a tentative attack against Zizhou, probably in the winter of 892, and retreated quickly after Li Maozhen's army intervened.¹²⁶ In January 893, he sent a capable general named Hua Hong 華洪 (later renamed Wang Zongdi 王宗滌, d. 902 or 903) to attack Langzhou, a prefecture then occupied by the defeated Yang Shouliang and his gang, where they retreated after being expelled from Xingyuan.¹²⁷ Clearly, the purpose of such an expedition was to cut off the communication lines between Li and Gu. One month later, Wang Jian invaded East Chuan again with a large number of troops, achieving numerous victories and compelling Gu Yanhui to humbly plead for a truce. Once Gu promised to break with Li Maozhen, Wang Jian recalled his troops.¹²⁸ At this time, Wang Jian wisely realized that the time was not ripe for a final conquest of East Chuan. Within his own domain, there was still an opponent at Pengzhou who needed to be destroyed first.

BESIEGING PENGZHOU

From any point of view, destroying the independence of Pengzhou had to be given the highest priority in Wang Jian's ambitious unification plan. Occupied by Yang Sheng 楊晟 (d. 894), who remained loyal to the dead Tian Lingzi and refused to submit, Pengzhou posed an immediate threat to Wang Jian's base. Before implementing his unification of the Shu, Wang Jian had to shift his focus to troublesome Pengzhou.

Wang Jian's experience at Pengzhou proved discouraging. In the spring of 888, he attempted an attack on Pengzhou, but abandoned the mission once Chen Jingxuan intervened.¹²⁹ Over the following several

years, especially in the critical year 891, when Wang Jian attacked Chengdu city, Chen Jingxuan continued to receive supplies from Pengzhou. Understandably, as soon as Wang Jian finished the Chengdu campaign, he immediately sent troops to attack Yang Sheng, his diehard opponent at Pengzhou.¹³⁰ The mission to pacify Pengzhou became more necessary in early 892, as Yang Sheng attempted to ally with the Yang confederates, the leading enemy of Wang Jian at that time.

In the eyes of Yang Sheng, the best means to survive was not a passive defense of Pengzhou, but a strategy of taking advantage of the power struggle between the three major powers in Shu. At the end of 891, the capture of the imperial envoy by Yang Shouhou and the ensuing conflict between the two Chuans offered Yang Sheng a good chance to ally with the Yang brothers. In March 892, Yang Sheng sent troops to raid the neighborhood of Chengdu, and, at the same time, dispatched an army to join Yang Shouhou's attack against Zizhou. But Wang Jian's formidable counterstrike caused both actions to end in defeat.¹³¹ After that, Pengzhou was besieged by Wang Jian from every direction.

The siege of Pengzhou drove Yang Sheng and his allies into panic. The Yangs never wanted to confront the formidable Wang Jian alone. They organized a series of rescues. First, Yang Shouliang led armies to penetrate to the Chengdu area, aiming to threaten Wang Jian from the rear at a time when most of his forces were already in action. But the sneak attack did not succeed. Hua Hong hurried back with his troops from the front, compelling the enemies to flee.¹³² One month later, the Yang confederates attacked Zizhou again, hoping to alleviate the pressure on Pengzhou. They failed again, losing even more troops, about six thousand killed and fifteen thousand captured.¹³³ The huge losses the Yangs suffered in this campaign were doubtless a major cause of their defeat by Li Maozhen in 892. After Xingyuan fell, the Yangs fled to Langzhou, completely losing the capacity to contend for East Chuan, much less to lend military aid to Yang Sheng.

Remarkably, however, the helpless Pengzhou survived Wang Jian's attacks for the next few years. Some reasons for this can be given here. First, under conditions of siege warfare in medieval China, the advantage

lay very much with the defenders in fortified cities.¹³⁴ More importantly, Yang Sheng's competence also contributed to the long resistance of Pengzhou. A former general of the imperial army, he was deemed a talented commander by his contemporaries, having led a number of successful missions during Xizong's exile.¹³⁵ "My prefecture is small, but I have successfully protected it [from Wang Jian's attacks] for three years" (弊邑雖小，圍守三年矣), he once boasted to his allies.¹³⁶ Yang Sheng's personality and reputation for benevolence had also won him the support of his subordinates and the Pengzhou populace. Because he had "appeased the people and respected his advisors" (撫綏士民，延敬賓客), as one source reports, Yang Sheng was "beloved by the [Pengzhou] people" (人甚懷之).¹³⁷ In contrast, when Wang Jian's expeditionary army besieged Pengzhou, the people in the suburbs fled to the mountains nearby to escape looting.¹³⁸ Facing a shortage of provisions, Wang Jian's men started to plunder local farmers for food, a practice they called "*taolu* 淘虜" (ransacking the captives).¹³⁹ These misdeeds surely pushed locals to be more loyal to Yang Sheng, who subsequently took the opportunity to strengthen the defense of Pengzhou. Thus, the siege lasted longer than Wang Jian had expected.

Wang Jian definitely did not want the prefecture to become a second Chengdu, which had taken him nearly four years to conquer. A change in strategy had to be made to win over the support of the local people. In the summer of 892, following the advice of a subordinate, Wang Jian issued a strict order to all his troops at the front forbidding them to harass the locals.¹⁴⁰ Yet the resistance of Pengzhou continued for two more years, until the food supplies in the city had been totally depleted. On June 21, 894, several generals of Pengzhou surrendered, and the recalcitrant Yang Sheng was slain atop the city wall. Pengzhou finally fell.¹⁴¹

ANNEXING EAST CHUAN

When Wang Jian prepared to invade East Chuan again, Li Maozhen remained his most powerful rival. Although Gu Yanhui had made a pledge to abandon his alliance with Li in early 893, in the face of Wang

Jian's military threat, the young governor understood that military aid from the north might be the only way to resist the encroachment of Wang Jian.

Li Maozhen's power reached its apex in 893. First, he installed one of his adopted sons as governor at Xingyuan and obtained more land by annexing the neighboring commands. In the summer of 893, after defeating the punitive imperial army, Li Maozhen strengthened his control over the court.¹⁴² The conquest of Langzhou, the last hiding place of the downcast Yang gang, completed his seizure of the entire Shannan West and inspired him to penetrate further southward.¹⁴³ Direct conflict between Wang Jian and Li Maozhen was inevitable. East Chuan became their battlefield: only the victor would control this vital territory.

Ironically, it was Li Maozhen's moves that facilitated Wang Jian's annexation of East Chuan. Wang Jian proved very crafty, taking advantage of the triangular conflict between Li, the court, and the other powers. When Li Maozhen smashed the remaining power of the Yangs, Wang Jian's army easily took Mianzhou, a prefecture originally occupied by the dead Yang Shouhou, thus seizing a strategic post on the important routes to Xingyuan.¹⁴⁴ One year later, when the news came to Chengdu that the court was in a crisis caused by several governors headed by Li Maozhen, Wang Jian used the occasion to encroach upon East Chuan.

The incident in the summer of 895 originated with the conflict between three allied governors around the Guanzhong area and the Shatuo leader Li Keyong in Hedong (northern Shanxi province), with both sides trying to support their respective surrogates to succeed to the governorship in a neighboring command. In June 895, Li Maozhen of Fengxiang, Wang Xingyu 王行瑜 of Binning 邠寧 (middle Shaanxi province), and Han Jian of Huazhou 華州 (today's Huaxian of Shaanxi province), entered Chang'an with their troops, causing great chaos in the capital. This situation invited the intervention of Li Keyong, who led his troops southward. The crisis only came under control two months later, when Li Keyong defeated Wang Xingyu and forced Li Maozhen to retreat. During the crisis, Zhaozong fled Chang'an again and only returned several months later. At the end of the year, after Li Keyong had completely destroyed Wang

Xingyu, he petitioned the court to attack Fengxiang, aiming at the final elimination of Li Maozhen. Yet, worrying about the expanding power of the Shatuo commander, the emperor decided to condone Li Maozhen's misdeeds; a foolish decision which only helped revive the rebellious governor's power and ambition and bring more disasters to the court.¹⁴⁵

The crisis in the capital meant a great deal to Wang Jian, though he was far from the strife at Chang'an. It provided him with a legitimate excuse to launch his own military action. Zhaozong sent an imperial edict to Wang Jian, asking for military aid: "Your loyalty to the court is higher than the sun, and your sincerity to the state is supreme. You have singularly pacified the turbulence in the Three Chuan. I depend on you to pacify the Central Plains and restore our state" (卿忠義貫日，至誠許國，三川不寧，一麾已定，清淨中原，再造我國家，朕有望於卿也).¹⁴⁶ Claiming he intended to "deliver the throne from peril" (*funan* 赴難), Wang Jian sent troops to Mianzhou.¹⁴⁷ Clearly, his purpose was not to show loyalty to the court, but to justify his military campaign against his enemies in nearby East Chuan. From Mianzhou, Wang Jian's army nibbled away at the territories of East Chuan. In January 896, Wang Jian launched a large-scale attack against Gu Yanhui, accusing the latter of refusing to render assistance to the imperiled court.¹⁴⁸ A great victory was achieved by Hua Hong to the east of Zizhou, where Gu lost nearly the entire cream of his armed forces.¹⁴⁹ By the time Wang Jian himself joined the expedition, his troops had occupied seven prefectures of East Chuan.¹⁵⁰ The fall of Zizhou seemed to be only a matter of time.

But Zizhou, like Chengdu and Pengzhou in the recent past, did not fall easily. The military defense of Zizhou was still strong. Meanwhile, Wang Jian's military actions caused the court to intervene. An imperial envoy arrived at Zizhou on June 20, 896, bringing Zhaozong's edict to mediate the "dispute" between the two circuits. The situation grew even more complicated as the governor of Jingnan joined the competition for East Chuan from the gorge area to the west. Under these circumstances, after assessing the difficulties of the moment, the prudent Wang Jian decided to retreat under the claim of "obeying the imperial order" (*feng zhao* 奉詔).¹⁵¹ But he knew he would be back soon.

Wang Jian did not wait too long to launch his next campaign. And again, he launched it in response to Li Maozhen's action in Guanzhong. In the summer of 896, Li Maozhen attacked Chang'an again, drove off the emperor, and burned down the palace. This time more governors showed interest in the exiled Zhaozong. Han Jian of Huazhou, Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (842–905) of Huainan, Zhu Wen in central Henan, and of course, Wang Jian, each petitioned the emperor to move the capital to their own respective domains.¹⁵² They obviously shared the same ambition: to obtain a superior position in the future contest over the central power by controlling the puppet throne, a strategy that had often proven effective in Chinese history. Wang Jian publicly exhibited his loyalty again, claiming to launch a punitive crusade against Li Maozhen.¹⁵³ In fact, his immediate goal at this stage was still the annexation of East Chuan.

Throughout the second half of 896, not a single military action by Wang Jian's troops is reported against Li Maozhen. In contrast, a small-size raid by Gu Yanhui's troops in early 897 immediately incurred Wang Jian's fierce retaliation.¹⁵⁴ This new campaign was more successful than the previous one. In March, a number of Wang Jian's adopted sons led armies to besiege Zizhou once again. The main force, led by Wang Zongyou 王宗佑 and Hua Hong, attacked Zizhou from all directions. At the same time, Wang Zongjin 王宗謹 and Wang Zongbo 王宗播 crushed the troops sent by Li Maozhen. A few days later, Wang Zongkan 王宗侃 and Wang Zongruan 王宗阮 seized Luzhou 瀘州 and Yuzhou 渝州 (today's Chongqing) in a long-range raid, guaranteeing his supply lines through the upper Yangzi. In June, Wang Jian himself joined the fighting in Zizhou with another fifty thousand troops.¹⁵⁵

Wang Jian was determined to win this time. Even a second intervention by the court did not turn him back. In late July, when an imperial envoy was sent to the front to urge a truce, Wang Jian's army almost broke through the southern gate of Zizhou. Wang Jian would not give up such an advantageous position. To the imperial envoy's request to withdraw, Wang Jian answered, "I cannot ignore my soldiers' wish [to conquer East Chuan]" (戰士之情不可奪也).¹⁵⁶ On November 16, 897,

the desperate Gu Yanhui committed suicide. Zizhou fell and Wang Jian successfully annexed East Chuan.¹⁵⁷

SEIZING SHANNAN WEST

The Circuit of Shannan West connected the wealthy inner Shu to the central Guanzhong region, constituting one of the areas most vital to Tang national security. The region had long served as a way station for the court when fleeing south for refuge. After Wang Jian annexed East Chuan, he shifted his attention to Li Maozhen, who had occupied the vast Shannan West for years. The region doubtless meant much to Wang Jian, who dreamt of expanding his domain to the north and even to the Central Plains to contend for the “Mandate of Heaven.” Thus, both for security and for the future development of his power, Wang Jian needed to seize Shannan West. In the years leading up to 903, taking advantage of the conflicts between Li Maozhen and his rivals in North China, Wang Jian gradually pushed his borders to the southern rim of the Zhongnan Mountain, succeeding in unifying the three circuits of Shu, which would constitute the core territories of his Shu empire in 907.¹⁵⁸

Actually, this was not an unfamiliar land to Wang Jian. As mentioned earlier, his fortunes in Shu began to improve at Lizhou and Langzhou in the late 880s. Wang Jian’s determination to seize the region can be traced back to the mid 890s. In a response to the imperial summon for rescue in 895, Wang Jian’s troops conquered the strategic Lizhou and forced four prefectures nearby to surrender.¹⁵⁹ Yet the crusade against Li Maozhen in Shannan West did not continue because the main target of Wang Jian at that time was still Gu Yanhui at Zizhou. A far-sighted strategist, Wang Jian skillfully controlled the pace to expand his power effectively. After merging East Chuan with his domains, he shifted his focus to Shannan West. As usual, he bided his time, seeking a better opportunity.

Li Maozhen’s troubles worked to Wang Jian’s benefit. Since 896, Li Maozhen had faced a new challenge from another powerful rival, Zhu Wen, a newly risen warlord in central Henan. In the late 890s, Zhu Wen built elegant palaces in Luoyang, a city closer to his own base at Bian 汴

(today's Kaifeng of Henan province), and invited the emperor to move the court from Chang'an.¹⁶⁰ At the same time, he actively expanded his influence westward to Guanzhong, where he inevitably encountered Li Maozhen's resistance. Zhu Wen's threat pushed Li Maozhen to repair his relations with Li Keyong, an irreconcilable foe of Zhu. As will be discussed later, the struggle between Li Maozhen and Zhu Wen in Guanzhong greatly influenced national politics and power structures during the last years of the Tang dynasty. Not surprisingly, it also provided a good opportunity for Wang Jian to seize Shannan West.

In the beginning, the conflict between Li Maozhen and Zhu Wen broke out in an indirect way through their agents at court. While Zhu supported a group of bureaucrats headed by Cui Yin 崔胤 (854–904), one of the chief ministers, Li Maozhen's confederates in the capital were mainly the entrenched eunuch group, longtime enemies of the civilian courtiers. At the turn of the tenth century, the struggle between the two factions grew ever more intense, ultimately bringing their masters into a direct conflict.¹⁶¹ In the early winter of 901, Zhu Wen sent troops to Chang'an, which scared the eunuchs. Headed by Han Quanhui 韓全誨 (d. 903), they abducted the emperor and fled Chang'an, running westward toward Fengxiang to seek refuge from Li Maozhen. When the army of Zhu Wen followed them to Fengxiang, a war broke out outside the city and soon spread to greater Guanzhong, involving Li Keyong as well.¹⁶²

Wang Jian quietly observed the chaos in North China from his base in Chengdu, looking for an opportunity to launch his next military action. It soon came. When the war between Li Maozhen and Zhu Wen reached a temporary impasse, both sides urgently sought a third force to break the balance. Interestingly, both sides saw Wang Jian as a potential ally who might tilt the balance of power in their favor. Though once a rival of Li Maozhen in East Chuan, Wang Jian, at least in the eyes of the Fengxiang clique, had no reason to refuse to "deliver the throne from peril," and was doubtless more trustworthy than the governors in Hebei province, who had either allied with Zhu Wen or submitted to him.¹⁶³ From Zhu Wen's point of view, Wang Jian had no conflict of interest with his own power in Henan province and might possibly join him to fight Li Maozhen.

Moreover, besides his military strength, Wang Jian's strategic location must have been another factor in his popularity: despite the mountains bordering the current Sichuan and Shaanxi provinces, Wang Jian's army could enter Guanzhong through the Shudao. Thus, compared to other governors such as Yang Xingmi of Huainan, who desired to intervene, Wang Jian was better positioned to influence the war. As a result, Wang Jian was invited to join the war by both sides that year.¹⁶⁴

Wang Jian's responses in early 902 to the two sides were crafty. On the one hand, he showed a friendly attitude to Zhu Wen by sending a letter in which he denounced Li Maozhen's misdeeds. But on the other, he sent messengers to Fengxiang and encouraged Li to resist, promising that his relief armies would soon arrive.¹⁶⁵ The purpose of this double-dealing was evident. It can be described by an old Chinese saying—"In the fight between a cormorant and a clam, it is the fisherman who profits" (*Yu bang xiangzheng, yuweng deli* 鷸蚌相爭，漁翁得利). Clearly, the "fisherman," Wang Jian, sought the "profit" of Shannan West.

Claiming he was going to rescue the emperor, Wang Jian sent his troops to Shannan West, where defenses were weak because Li Maozhen had to concentrate most of his forces to fight Zhu Wen at Fengxiang. In the winter of 902, the Shu forces marched to Xingyuan and "borrowed a passage" (*jiadao* 假道) [asked for permission to pass] to Fengxiang. When the spurious request was turned down, the Shu army launched attacks and easily conquered the largest city of Shannan.¹⁶⁶ Only one month later, two other important prefectures, Yangzhou 洋州 (today's Yangxian of Shaanxi province) and Xingzhou, fell into the hands of Wang Jian, as Li Maozhen's domination over Shannan West rapidly collapsed.¹⁶⁷ Wang Jian's occupation of Shannan West apparently shook Li Maozhen's confidence in his prospects for victory in his ongoing war with Zhu Wen. In spring 903, Li Maozhen proposed an armistice, agreeing to execute all eunuchs under his control and return the emperor.¹⁶⁸ Zhu Wen won the war, but he also paid the price of losing men and incurring huge military expenses. Wang Jian was actually the biggest winner in the war.

Obviously, two major factors contributed to Wang Jian's success during this period. First, he cleverly took advantage of the power struggles

among the warlords within Shu and across North China, as shown in his conquests of East Chuan and Shannan West, respectively. The other factor, in his advisor Zhang Qianyu's words, was "to act by invoking the great cause" (杖大義而行), namely to obtain legitimacy by showing loyalty to the emperor.¹⁶⁹ His strategy of exploiting the prestige of the Tang court contributed greatly to his rise in the late Tang period and to his subsequent founding of the Shu empire.

Not surprisingly, the tie between Wang Jian and the court continued. In 901, when Zhaozong survived an attempted usurpation, the emperor restated his dependence on Wang Jian in another edict sent to Chengdu: "I am counting on you to be a bulwark for the throne" (為朕藩護，有望於卿也).¹⁷⁰ In early 903, when the emperor returned to Chang'an from Fengxiang, Wang Jian sent some tea and cloth to the capital as tribute to show his continuing loyalty to the court.¹⁷¹ From 891 to 903, from the time of his conquest of Chengdu to the unification of Shu, Wang Jian obtained numerous esteemed offices and honorary titles from the court, in addition to the lands he seized in the name of "saving the throne," which further added to his air of legitimacy. In 900, Zhaozong conferred upon him the title "Prince of Pacifying the West" (西平王), paralleling the title "Prince of Pacifying the East" (東平王) that the court conferred upon Zhu Wen around the same time.¹⁷² Clearly, in the eyes of the emperor Zhaozong, the two were not only the most meritorious of those involved in the crisis of Fengxiang and the most powerful governors in China at that time but also the most potentially dangerous, as indicated by the extent to which he felt they needed to be placated. Three years later, shortly after Wang Jian unified all of Shu, he was promoted to "King of Shu" (蜀王), a title he bore until his accession to the imperial throne in 907.¹⁷³

CHAPTER 3

WANG JIAN AND THE MILITARY, 887–907

年少万兜鍪，坐断东南战未休。天下英雄谁敌手？曹刘。
生子当如孙仲谋。

*A youthful Sun Quan, with tens of thousands of men in armor,
Fought endless wars in defense of his southeastern satrap.
Who could rival him in heroism, save for Cao Cao and Liu Bei?
And even Cao would have a son akin to Sun Quan in heroism.*

—Xin Qiji, “Nan xiang zi” 南鄉子¹

For several turbulent days in the early summer of 903, the third year of the Tianfu reign 天復, the city of Chengdu was suddenly filled with flying dust and neighing horses, as hundreds of sturdy cavalymen from neighboring prefectures flooded the streets of the capital. Word spread quickly among clusters of townsmen: a grand military parade would soon

be held, which, as the Chengdu people might have conjectured, was to serve as a welcome for the recently arrived envoy from North China.

One source vividly records the interesting dialogue during a reception banquet between Wang Jian and the guest on the topic of Shu military forces. Wang Yin 王殷, the Later Liang envoy and military administrator (Yaya 押牙), acknowledged the large number of Shu troops, but expressed scorn for its lack of horses for cavalry, prompting the hubris-filled Shu ruler to offer an irritated rebuttal: “I often thought that there would be no opportunity for cavalry deployments [in Shu] due to the obstacles of the mountainous terrain. But our Shu is never short of horses! Please stay a little longer and we will inspect [my cavalries] together” (當道江山險阻，騎兵無所施，然馬亦不乏，押牙少留，當共閱之). Several days later, a grand procession paraded through the northern suburbs of Chengdu, with twelve thousand steeds on display. The horses, according to a historian, were merely a part of the total owned by Shu and did not include those of East Chuan and Shannan West, due to the hurried preparations for the parade.² Not surprisingly, Wang Yin was totally shocked and “marveled in acknowledging” (*tan fu* 嘆服), both the mightiness of the Shu military and the amazing rapidity of Wang Jian’s arrangement of such a great parade.³

The military was a vital tool for making political statements throughout China’s two-thousand-year imperial history, particularly during eras of dynastic transition or political tumult. It is certain that war was one of the most important tools used by the Chinese and their alien conquerors in building and maintaining their empires, and that the strength of the territorial claims of each dynasty was often determined by its military capacity.⁴ This intimate relationship between the military and Chinese politics can be seen clearly in the history of the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods, a chaotic time in which “the rise and fall of regimes emanated entirely from armaments” (五代為國，興亡以兵).⁵ No wonder a military governor of the day declared that, “Any man with enough stalwart soldiers and mighty steeds can be Son of Heaven; pedigree is hardly necessary” (天子，兵強馬壯者當為之，寧有種耶).⁶ Thus, military success was a validation for the warlords’ rule and even a moral

justification for their being. Indeed, as modern scholars have pointed out, the mastery of a powerful military constituted an indispensable condition for such potentates—both in the north and in the south—in late ninth and early tenth century China.⁷ In the same way, Wang Jian organized, strengthened, and controlled a powerful army to validate his rule in Shu. “It is the sword that I used to pacify the Qin-Shu region” (以干戈定秦蜀), he once boasted.⁸ Relying on his powerful military force, Wang Jian could contend for legitimacy after the Tang perished and share Heaven’s Mandate with other regional regimes of his day.

REBUILDING THE SHU ARMY

As detailed in chapter 2, Wang Jian’s crack military forces contributed significantly to both his successful overthrow of Chen Jingxuan and his later unification of the whole of Three Chuan. This army had developed notably by the end of 902, both in numbers of soldiers as well as generals and commanders, keeping pace with Wang Jian’s rapid territorial expansion. In general, it consisted of five components: a small group of seasoned Zhongwu soldiers who had followed Wang Jian from Henan, men commanded by him since 881 or even earlier; a large number of local Shu troops who had surrendered during his conquests of Shu; a few regiments from Qi, most of whom surrendered with the fall of Shannan West; some thousands of native tribal men recruited from Langzhou in the early 880s; and local militias of varying size. In the process of his conquest of Shu, Wang Jian expanded his military forces by incorporating and assimilating all possible groups, and effectively rebuilt, sharpened and controlled this “mixed” force to produce a totally new Shu army.

Undeniably, the loyal and experienced Zhongwu soldiers who had fought side by side with Wang Jian since the early 880s, from Henan to Chang’an, from Xingyuan to Chengdu, formed the nucleus of his reformulated army. First of all, the fitness of military men hailing from the Zhongwu Command should be noted. The military capability of Tang troops from the northern provinces was usually much superior to that of soldiers recruited from the south, particularly in the late Tang period. The

reasons for this are complex and beyond the scope of this study, but the imbalanced geographic distribution of garrisons arranged by the early Tang government for national security—many in the north and northwest, few in the south—reflected the qualitative disparity between the forces of the north and those of the south.⁹ This imbalance in both the number and the quality of troops had far-reaching consequences in the political transition of the late ninth and early tenth centuries. As Huang Chao's peasant army fought its way from North China to the south, most southern provinces could not organize effective defenses. Not surprisingly, nearly all of the founders of the regimes established in the south on the ashes of destruction were military men from the north, whose elite troops and able commanders, with few exceptions, were also of northern origin.¹⁰

The military abilities of northerners from Zhongwu are abundantly documented. As discussed previously, these warriors had exhibited extraordinary valor and toughness in a series of battles on the road to Chengdu from 887 to 891, including the conquest of Lutou Pass, the great victory at Xinfan and the capture of Qiongzhou. The martial virtuosity of Wang Jian's Zhongwu subordinates is perhaps best illustrated by his personal guards, the Elite Dragoon (Qinqi jun 親騎軍), composed of four hundred intrepid men, which was said to have overcome hardships in many battles, and to never have been defeated.¹¹ Just as important, these indomitable veterans were characterized by solidarity and loyalty. Notably, nearly all of them hailed from the Zhongwu Command centered in the Chen-Xu region, and many were natives of Xuzhou, the hometown of Wang Jian, including his own relatives and many adopted sons. This tie of shared homeland and kinship instilled a deep-seated fraternity and solidarity among the Zhongwu troops, enabling Wang Jian to establish a culture of loyalty and personal authority. This Zhongwu force also included some units staffed by Wang Jian's retainers, like the Elite Dragoon, all personal guards (*qincong* 親從) intimate with their commander.¹² Though the size of this Zhongwu force might not have been large—probably fewer than five thousand men when Wang Jian entered Chengdu in 901—the crucial role they played in his success far exceeded that of any other army.¹³

Compared to the Zhongwu veterans, the surrendered troops from West and East Chuan were vast in number, and there is no doubt that these former Shu forces constituted the majority of Wang Jian's new army in the early 900s. Before going further, a discussion of the military tradition of Shu and its historical development is necessary. The ancient Shu people, especially the Ba men in eastern Sichuan, were well known for their military skill and extraordinary valor in battle.¹⁴ The historical reputation of Shu warriors, however, did not last into the Tang dynasty, when the quality of troops was so poor that a Tang official relentlessly mocked them with these words: "The frail Shu people are not good at military affairs; a hundred of them dare not confront a single barbarian with a spear" (蜀人佺劣，不習兵戰，一虜持矛，百人莫敢當).¹⁵ The feebleness of native Shu forces can also be seen in the Tang court's frequent transfer of armies from North China to defend Shu's borders against the hostile Nanzhao.¹⁶

The quality of the Shu army might have improved gradually in the period of recurrent wars along the borders, especially under the effective administrations of able governors such as Wei Gao and Li Deyu, who were known to have made a lot of effort to strengthen the native Shu military forces.¹⁷ Yet the gap between the Shu soldiers and the troops from the north remained obvious until the time of Gao Pian (governor, 875–878), who was said to have cut the benefits of native soldiers, using their weakness as an excuse.¹⁸ Several years later, the new governor, Cui Anqian, probably for the same reason, petitioned the court to transfer six thousand "crack soldiers" (*rui bing* 銳兵) from Shandong to guard the prefectures of West Chuan.¹⁹ It was under Cui, governor from 878 to 880, that a new army, called "Yellow Hood Corps" (Huangtou jun 黃頭軍) was established in Chengdu to strengthen the defenses against the Nanzhao, and all of its soldiers, reported to number three thousand, were recruited from the well-known Zhongwu of Henan, the hometown of Wang Jian.²⁰ This elite force had expanded quickly under Chen Jingxuan, the last West Chuan governor before Wang Jian, and its ferocity was soon proven in a series of victories in 881, when a force of fifteen thousand left for Chang'an to suppress Huang Chao.²¹ So, clearly, the

original Shu army itself, at least at the moment when Wang Jian came to power, was a mixed one, consisting of both the weak native troops and many northern soldiers of quality. The size of the Shu army assimilated by Wang Jian into his own army after seizing West Chuan was more than sixty thousand men. When those from East Chuan were added after 897, the size of his army must have been much larger.²²

Another segment of troops that had surrendered came from Li Maozhen's Qi army, acquired during twenty years of constant military conflict. First, during the contention in Shannan West, a large number of Qi troops surrendered, most during the fall of Xingyuan in 902. Though the origins of the soldiers cannot be known exactly—probably part were recruited locally and part sent from Fengxiang—they likely exceeded fifty thousand in number.²³ More than a decade later in another Qi-Shu war, Li Maozhen suffered even heavier military losses, the biggest of which must have been the capitulation of twenty thousand troops to the Shu army at Longzhou 隴州 (today's Longxian of Shaanxi province).²⁴ At the end of 905, in addition to the Qi soldiers, about twenty thousand troops from the middle Yangzi region, under the command of a governor who had lost his domain and had to flee to Chengdu for refuge, further augmented Wang Jian's military strength.²⁵ Of course, those valiant "barbarian" soldiers, roughly a few thousand recruited in the late 880s, formed another unique part of Wang Jian's army and greatly strengthened his military forces.²⁶

The last major part of Wang Jian's mixed army came from local militias. In Tang times, some local officials and magnates organized natives into militias and trained them to provide local security from the rebels and brigands. Such organizations quickly developed nationwide during and after the Huang Chao rebellion.²⁷ Militias in Shu had a long tradition in the Tang dynasty. These military men, usually called *tanding* 壇丁 (or *tanbing* 壇兵, *xiangbing* 鄉兵, *yibing* 義兵), were probably first recruited and trained in the Shu border regions with the aid of the provincial government, mostly to be mobilized against the Nanzhao.²⁸ As these local military organizations became more prevalent and powerful across Shu during the turbulent late Tang period, both the control and

use of this force by Shu governors became inevitable.²⁹ Wang Jian surely noticed the strength of the militias in the beginning of his adventure in Shu and made efforts to win their support. As early as the summer of 888, one of his adopted sons, Wang Zongyao 王宗瑤, was sent to canvass the local magnates in Mianzhu 綿竹 (today's Deyang of Sichuan province) and Qiongzhou for support. These missions were successful, and both military and financial assistance from the local militias greatly reinforced Wang Jian's army and helped it rapidly "recover again" (*fu zhen* 複振) from a difficult period.³⁰ The contributions of militias to Wang Jian's success can also be seen in his occupation of Rongzhou 戎州 (today's Yibin of Sichuan province) in 890, a prefecture in the far south that was first captured by a local magnate, who subsequently submitted to Wang Jian.³¹ The annexation of East Chuan in 897 serves as another example. At the time when Wang Jian launched his annexation campaign against Gu Yanhui, most of the territories of East Chuan were actually controlled by a group of local magnates. Represented by Wei Junjing 韋君靖, they maintained large local militias and maintained stability at the local level.³² Wang Jian sent emissaries to meet those local leaders, asking them to choose between "bust or boom" (*huo fu* 禍福): those who pledged allegiance were given high offices, but the recalcitrants were attacked by punitive expeditions.³³ In this way, Wang Jian successfully penetrated into the local prefectures and occupied all of East Chuan. The total number of militias must have been huge, though few details are known today.³⁴

From the survey just made, it can be seen that in the first decade of the tenth century Wang Jian's burgeoning army approached three hundred thousand men.³⁵ It seems that the size of this army was maintained until the reign of Wang Jian's son in 925, as mentioned by an official history.³⁶ Admittedly, modern historians of China have usually questioned the extraordinary figures given in traditional histories, but the number of Wang Jian's troops mentioned above might not be too exaggerated.³⁷ As shown in the previous discussion of Wang Jian progressive expansion into, and military dominance of, a populous Shu, the existence of such a huge army was possible.³⁸ Excluding local militias, the total standing

army in the early 900s might have been about two hundred thousand. Such a substantial military force could have been rivaled by few regional overlords across a fractured Tang empire in the early tenth century.³⁹

This huge military force, composed mostly of infantry, also included a crack cavalry and even a navy. For a long time, the fitness and mobility of mounted warriors in battle had been greatly valued in China and, not surprisingly, both the central government of the Tang and the regional regimes in the Five Dynasties period paid much attention to the construction of cavalry forces.⁴⁰ Although the vast, mountainous landscape surrounding the Chengdu plain was obviously not ideal for deploying cavalry, Wang Jian still expressed a lot of zeal for building a mounted army. His interest in cavalry probably stemmed from his own early experience as a horseman in the Zhongwu army fighting rebels in Jiangxi, where he must have recognized the effectiveness of this special arm of service. Besides the Elite Dragoon under his personal command, a large cavalry force also gradually developed during the first decade after his conquest of Chengdu. His military horses, sources report, not only came as spoils of war but also from trade with tribes along the southwestern border.⁴¹ Little wonder that the envoy of Zhu Wen was shocked at the military parade. He could never have imagined that so many horses might be gathered so quickly in remote Shu. Indeed, compared to other regimes of the time, especially those in south China, where horses were far scarcer than in the north, the rich supply of horses in Shu at this time was very impressive.⁴² The effectiveness of the Shu cavalry was augmented by some Shatuo Turkish soldiers were recruited to teach their nomadic riding and archery skills. An example of these was An Chongba 安重霸, who was given significant posts for his riding skills after surrendering to the Shu from the forces he had previously fought with in the north.⁴³ This crack cavalry, without doubt, placed Wang Jian in an advantageous position in the competition with other potentates for political dominance after 907, when the last Tang emperor was deposed and rival warlords vied to claim the Mandate of Heaven.

Straddling the strategic upper Yangzi River, Shu also developed a navy that played a part in the military confrontation with Jingnan to the east,

along the gorges. As early as 903, a sizable navy, reportedly of fifteen thousand men, was sent by Wang Jian to defend the gorges.⁴⁴ Though the number might be a little exaggerated, there is no doubt that a formidable naval force was built during Wang Jian's reign. Extant sources record the names of two Shu naval units, the "Flying Oars Brigade" (Feizhao du 飛棹都) and the "Breaking Waves Brigade" (Polang du 破浪都).⁴⁵ The importance of the navy in Wang Jian's military force can also be seen in the grand military parade in 908. The special review of warships in that parade testified to the vital military role the navy played.⁴⁶

Needless to say, reforming his new army and transforming men who had surrendered into loyal and capable warriors of his own must have been one of the most urgent tasks in Wang Jian's career. Military organization, therefore, became crucial because it influenced not only efficiency in battle but also the control and management of troops. As a seasoned commander with over twenty years of experience, Wang Jian did not neglect this issue. In fact, a careful reorganization of troops had started earlier, in 887, after he conquered Langzhou, where about two dozen infantry regiments were garrisoned. Newly incorporated and recruited troops were put under the command of his fellow Xuzhou natives, adopted sons, or reliable Zhongwu captains.⁴⁷ With his military successes in Shu, more military units, usually known as "brigades" (*du* 都), were built to assimilate the troops who had surrendered. Elite forces thus emerged with designations such as the "Decisive Cloud Brigade" (Jueyun du 決雲都) and the "Definitive Victory Brigade" (Juesheng du 決勝都), headed by his trustworthy subordinates and adopted sons, through whom Wang Jian effectively maintained absolute control over the military.⁴⁸

There is no doubt that Wang Jian's reconstruction of this new army was both expeditious and effective, as proven by a series of successful military campaigns, such as the siege of Pengzhou—launched merely four months after the capture of Chengdu, and his large-scale strike on Shannan West in 902—both of which relied heavily upon a large number of Shu troops who had surrendered. Its efficacy can be vividly imagined from the writing of a contemporary, who seemed surprised

when comparing Wang Jian's army with the timid soldiers of Tang guarding the same borders a generation earlier: "When Yunnan invaded during the reign of Wang Jian, the crack Shu forces fought bravely, appearing to swallow alive the enemies, whom they captured easily and even seized as provisions, never taking them as serious rivals. Such valor is indeed a hundred times that of the Shu troops in earlier days" (王蜀先主時，雲南寇蜀，蜀軍勇銳欲吞之，俘擒啖食，不以為敵，與向前之兵，百倍其勇也).⁴⁹

COMMANDING HEROES

Due to the tremendous size of this expanded army, Wang Jian dominated the military through his generals. In fact, throughout his long military career, especially in the odyssey in Shu during the last decade of the ninth century, he made special efforts to attract as many talented martial men as possible in order to "amass all heroes in pursuit of hegemony" (總攬英雄以圖霸業), in the words of one advisor.⁵⁰ The commanders in Wang Jian's army can be divided into three groups according to their origins and relationship to him: his adopted sons (most from Xuzhou), his old comrades of Zhongwu, and a large number of officers who had surrendered.

The large number of informally adopted sons doubtless formed the majority of Wang Jian's most reliable officers. Adopting valiant martial warriors as "fictive sons" (*jiazi* 假子) as a means to expand and strengthen personal control of the military was quite common during the Tang and Five Dynasties periods, especially among the powerful eunuchs dominating the court in the late ninth century, such as Tian Lingzi and Yang Fugong.⁵¹ Since the late Tang period, many ambitious provincial governors had also imitated this practice to build up and solidify their own military power. Among the most famous was the Shatuo leader Li Keyong, who "selected the most intrepid soldiers in his armies to adopt as sons" (擇軍中驍勇者多養為子), even establishing an elite fighting force known as the "Army of Righteous Sons" (Yi'er jun 義兒軍).⁵² Compared to his contemporaries, Wang Jian, himself a former adopted

FIGURE 3. Statue of a Former Shu Commander.



son of Tian Lingzi, heavily utilized such pseudo-kinship relationships to consolidate his military authority. It was said that he had one hundred and twenty such “fictive sons” in his army,⁵³ and about a third of these can be traced in historical sources.

Obviously, nearly all of the adopted sons were professional military men, including more than a few longstanding military retainers and subordinates who had followed Wang Jian since his early days in the Zhongwu army. They were either “recorded as foster sons” (*lu yi wei zi* 錄以為子) or merely “given a new name” (*ci xingming* 賜姓名 or *geng xingming* 更姓名), both taking “Wang 王” as the surname followed by the character “*zong* 宗,” a mark of their pseudo familial relations to Wang Jian, whose own sons shared the same genealogical identification.⁵⁴

Superior martial virtuosity was the primary criterion for selection as a foster son. Wang Zongyao, for instance, was described by a source as a strapping horseman who always charged forward in battle waving an exceedingly long spear, a formidable image that usually intimidated enemies on sight.⁵⁵ Another example is Wang Zongshu 王宗鉞, a junior captain who joined Jian in 884, a man whose valor was so well known among the experienced Zhongwu soldiers that he earned a unique sobriquet—“Martial Zilu” (*Wu Zilu* 武子路).⁵⁶ The most intrepid and capable man in this group was Wang Zongdi (Hua Hong), who, as mentioned in chapter 2, contributed greatly to Wang Jian’s successful conquest of the Three Chuan. Though he was adopted a little later than other subordinates, Zongdi caught Wang Jian’s attention from the very beginning. Promoted to associate general, Zongdi’s prodigious strength and generous personality rapidly earned him the support of the Zhongwu army. He immediately showcased his military talents in the late 880s when Wang Jian appointed him commander of the vanguard in the attack on Chengdu. During Wang Jian’s subsequent military expansion, Zongdi assumed chief command of almost every campaign, and his unparalleled merit finally won him the top rank among all fifty-three elite brigade commanders in the expanded army.⁵⁷ Of course, martial talents were not the only virtues possessed by these “fictive sons.” Wang Zongkan, for example, was known for his sagacious counsel, channeling the concerns and folksy wisdom of the lower ranks to Wang Jian. These ideas were applied to the campaign against Pengzhou, successfully ending the long siege.⁵⁸

Observation of the career patterns of several men serving under Wang Jian makes another practice apparent. Most of those who

commanded elite forces and later gained provincial governorships and high ranks at court were either Wang Jian's relatives or his earlier adopted sons who had served him since his time in the Zhongwu army. In times of turmoil, when submissions and defections occurred frequently, Wang Jian's reliance upon men with longstanding personal ties to him is readily understandable. Without exception, key positions in his army, such as the commissioner of guards patrolling the metropolitan region (Chengdu *neiwai duzhihui shi* 成都内外都指揮使), were reserved for men from this group.⁵⁹ These deep and long-lasting bonds might explain why when Wang Zongbi 王宗弼 (d. 925), one of his earliest retainers, returned from a shameful capture and obvious defection, Wang Jian still "treated him as usual" (*dai zhi ru gu* 待之如故) and even "appointed him to command elite forces again years later" (逾年複令將上軍).⁶⁰

For the same reason, many important positions and honors were also given to military men hailing from Xuzhou, where Wang Jian grew up and started his military career. Actually, this was a very common phenomenon in the Five Dynasties period as founders of regional regimes made their fortunes by gathering and relying on a colony of natives from hometown.⁶¹ They shared the same origins, customs, and dialects; they usually came from the same armies and thus shared experience in battle. Once these bonds were established between lord and vassal, between general and soldier, these friendships in adversity often generated rare trust and loyalty between them. This helps explain why most of Wang Jian's "fictive sons" adopted before 890 were natives of Xuzhou.⁶² This Xuzhou group also included many former companions and subordinates in the Zhongwu and imperial Shence armies, men who constituted another significant set of commanders in Wang Jian's army. Among them, the most well-known were the three former heads of the Eight Zhongwu Brigades, namely, Jin Hui, Zhang Zao and Li Shitai, whose continuing military and spiritual support provided Wang Jian much-needed help at the beginning of his adventure in Shu. Zhang Zao, for example, stood up to inspire the whole army at a time when Wang Jian's troops were faced with a serious shortage of provisions and fierce enemy counterattacks.⁶³ Another

Xuzhou commander, the austere Zhang Qing 張勅, helped maintain military discipline in Chengdu. The martial Li Jian 李簡 often vanquished enemies who far outnumbered him, playing an important role in Wang Jian's early accomplishments.⁶⁴ There is no doubt that these loyal and capable military commanders, together with civil aides from Xuzhou, formed another major support group for Wang Jian. Without assistance from this large and dependable colony of Xuzhou natives, Wang Jian could never have achieved such swift success in Shu.⁶⁵

Of course, not all military commanders in Wang Jian's army were adopted sons and Xuzhou natives. There also existed a large group of generals who had surrendered and were later incorporated into the army during combat in Shu. Indeed, as Naomi Standen has pointed out; in that period, "a ruler's own authority depended at least partly on his ability to entice the followers of others into allegiance to him."⁶⁶ In particular, three major considerations of Wang Jian in using this group should be considered: first, a rapidly expanding army needed experienced officers; second, retaining officers who had surrendered in their original posts, at least temporarily, helped maintain the stability of the army after assimilating large numbers of enemy soldiers; and last, well-treated captives would themselves often convince more hesitant enemies to cease resistance and surrender. In most cases, Wang Jian showed himself a very generous and far-sighted leader who recognized the value of men who had surrendered and endeavored to convert them into a loyal group. As early as 891, when Chengdu was conquered, all the able officers previously subordinated to Chen Jingxuan were "respected and employed" (*li er yong zhi* 禮而用之) by the new governor.⁶⁷ This group quickly expanded with Wang Jian's continuous military victories, and not a few were adopted as his "fictive sons."⁶⁸ Some of the more talented officers who were part of the group that had surrendered even managed to gain a level of trust and honor that was akin to that of Wang Jian's most-favored adopted sons. For example, Wen Wujian 文武堅, known as Wang Zongruan 王宗阮 after 891, was appointed as commander of an elite army and soon showed his military ability in an expedition in 897.⁶⁹ Xu Cun 許存 (adopted as Wang Zongbo 王宗播), a former general of

Jingnan, was given important positions years later.⁷⁰ Another general named Wang Hu 王胡 was even bestowed one of Wang Jian's concubines after he surrendered in Fengxiang.⁷¹ Of course, there was still a small fraction of commanders who surrendered whom Wang Jian neither trusted nor granted additional posts. Li Jimi 李繼密 (Wang Wanhong 王萬弘), one of the adopted sons of Li Maozhen and the former governor of Shannan West, was said to have ended his disconsolate life in Chengdu a few years after surrendering.⁷² Obviously, his submission was used as an example of Wang Jian's generosity. Overall, through a broad acceptance and selective use of men who had surrendered, Wang Jian both gathered capable commanders for his expanding army and maintained effective control at the same time.

WANG JIAN'S MILITARY LEADERSHIP

From the moment Wang Jian entered Shu, he exhibited a seasoned professional military man's ability to organize, hone, motivate, and harness both his rapidly expanding body of troops and his large group of commanders. His rich battle experience over the past two and a half decades surely enhanced his extraordinary competence as a military leader. Starting from scratch as a private soldier, Wang Jian gradually built up a large, effective army of his own, which became the very foundation of his grand ambitions. As one source remarks, he "possessed both the talent to rein in his subordinates and the good judgment in addressing events" (禦眾有術，臨事能斷).⁷³ His talent developed during his lifelong command of troops. This genius for leadership greatly contributed to his military success, both in the earlier campaigns in Shu and during subsequent contentions with neighboring powers.

First of all, because he started his own military career at the bottom of the ranks, Wang Jian fully understood the importance of a commander's personal example for the morale of soldiers. Wang Jian was precisely such an exemplary commander. As a leader who would join his warriors shoulder-to-shoulder in battle, he instilled admiration and loyalty in his men, who in return would fight bravely. Even after he had been appointed

military governor of Yongping in the late 880s and led a huge army to attack the walled city of Chengdu, he still dressed like an underling in his formidable “Demon Guards” (*gui bing* 鬼兵), a sign that Wang Jian still attended battle in person.⁷⁴ “Intrepid and resourceful,” an advisor once commented with respect, Wang Jian proved that he had “won the hearts of all soldiers” (勇而有謀，得士卒心).⁷⁵

As for practical measures to control armies, Wang Jian frequently utilized the distribution of punishments and rewards as a tactic. He introduced a strict code of discipline that distinguished his army from most of the other forces of his day. As an officer in charge of military discipline in Qin Zongquan’s armies years before, Wang Jian must have been fully aware of the value of military discipline to both an army’s fitness and its commander’s authority. By one account, after conquering Chengdu, Wang Jian appointed the ironhanded Zhang Qing to patrol it, forbidding plundering and looting by publicly executing lawless soldiers. After that, Zhang Qing gained a sobriquet, “Chest Punching Zhang” (Zhang daxiong 張打胸).⁷⁶ In another story, a military officer defied the rules by riding unscrupulously in the governor’s hall, proclaiming that “The commander has promised to promote me to be a governor soon [after the war]; of course I have the right to ride here.” Upon receiving the report, Wang Jian secretly executed the man.⁷⁷ Clearly, he intended to both maintain order and save the face of the meritorious warrior. Both stories above illustrate Wang Jian’s resolve to strengthen discipline in his army. In his sober mind, a military force could not be pampered, especially after continuous victories, if effectiveness was to be maintained. Severe punishment was even extended to meritorious senior officers, including some of his adopted sons, who violated laws or challenged his absolute authority. In the summer of 914, when governor Wang Zongxun 王宗訓, one of his most able adopted sons, known for his bravery in the campaign against Pengzhou, left his post without permission and even “obstreperously” requested more favors, the ruthless Wang Jian immediately ordered the guards to execute him.⁷⁸ Even Wang Zongkan, one of his most-favored adopted sons, was reprimanded severely for disrespectful manners at one point.⁷⁹

In contrast, a similar rigorousness was seldom found among other regional potentates of the day, most of whom preferred generosity and tolerance over severe discipline in controlling troops. Li Keyong, the martial Shatuo leader, known for pampering his subordinates, once explained his reasons for refusing to punish guilty captains: “All governors of our day recruit brave men with material bounty; if I harness them with regulations, they will abandon me in times of peril. How could I protect my domain” (今四方諸侯皆懸重賞以募勇士，吾若束之以法，急則棄吾，吾安能獨保此乎)?⁸⁰ A similar consideration is found in the attitudes of some other contemporary potentates. Li Maozhen of Qi was known for his loose control of his soldiers, and Li Bian of the Southern Tang was said to have refused to punish guilty guards whose military talents he needed.⁸¹ Perhaps the only potentate of the era whose strictness with his military paralleled Wang Jian’s was Zhu Wen, a draconian leader known for executing whole sections of his army for returning without their section officers.⁸² But Wang Jian was more balanced in his approach. Neither lax nor excessive, his measured and skillfully controlled discipline was successfully implemented. “Strict yet never cruel, that is the way His Majesty Wang supervises troops” (王公治眾嚴而不殘), once remarked an overawed adversary, a man who soon surrendered to Wang Jian, assuming that such a masterful commander could never be vanquished.⁸³ For Wang Jian, the combination of reward and discipline functioned very effectively for troops with complex histories and associations.

Employing rewards as a counterbalance to punishment served as the other wheel of Wang Jian’s approach to military governance. This was a highly conventional means of winning support from subordinates. He often rewarded commanders and troops who achieved merit in battle with cash and promotions, in some cases even bestowing names or adopting exceptional ones as a “*jiazi*.” On some occasions, especially during the hard times when the troops faced stiff resistance from Chen Jingxuan around 890, Wang Jian had to resort to tempting promises to encourage his soldiers. With his impressive string of victories, Wang Jian obtained vast booty to distribute among his warriors. As soon as his regime achieved stability in Shu, he allocated many fertile lands and

valuable property to senior commanders and meritorious subordinates.⁸⁴ In total, fifteen generals from the Zhongwu army became military governors; among them, nine were from the Xuzhou group.⁸⁵

Wang Jian offered more than material wealth and high offices. He earned a reputation as a lord who possessed the genius to win over the loyal support and esteem of his men. The commander-in-chief was known to lick the wound (a traditional medical treatment used as a temporary emergency measure) of a brave captain who got injured in a battle.⁸⁶ In another case, when the intrepid Wang Zongshu repulsed a mass of enemies with a single spear, tremendously boosting the morale of troops on his side, Wang Jian immediately promised to confer upon him immunity to punishment for up to ten capital offenses once Chengdu was conquered, a unique award usually bestowed by emperors on men of exceptional merit.⁸⁷ Another story might reveal more about how Wang Jian enhanced his leadership by establishing lasting bonds with underlings. When the death of Zhang Zao's only son was reported during the campaign against Zizhou, Wang Jian burst into a wail with a melodramatic flourish because he was reminded of Zhang Zao, who had succumbed years earlier near Chengdu.⁸⁸ This moving gesture struck a chord with warriors on the scene. A sincere leader like Wang Jian, they believed, deserved their loyalty and sacrifice.

Of course, flaws did exist in the man. "Highly inscrutable and full of cunning," remarks the *Old History of Five Dynasties*, "it was usually very hard to anticipate his thoughts" (雄猜多機略，意嘗難測).⁸⁹ The same judgment is echoed by another source which, after praising him, accuses the ruler of "excessive jealousy and sanguinary nature that caused many commanders of merit to die for assorted reasons" (多忌好殺，諸將有功名者多因事誅之).⁹⁰ The dark side of Wang Jian the military upstart was soon exposed after his rapid success in Shu.

A good example of Wang Jian's suspicious nature is the case of the able Xu Cun (Wang Zongbo) before his adoption. When Xu defected from Jingnan, his well-known military talents caused misgivings in Wang Jian, who even planned to murder him as a precaution. Persuaded by an advisor, the ruler temporarily forgave the general but still put him

under the surveillance of a reliable adopted son, until his suspicions were allayed by reports that Xu was “loyal and modest” (*zhong jin* 忠謹).⁹¹

Hua Hong (Wang Zongdi), the best commander in Wang Jian’s army, was not that lucky. Enjoying great military prestige, Hua naturally drew the envy of other generals and adopted sons, such as Zongji, the eldest adopted son of Wang Jian, who secretly slandered his foster brother many times before his “father.” The extraordinary ability of Hua doubtless instilled anxiety in the suspicious Wang Jian, especially when Hua’s fame seemed to have reached its apogee, after his conquest of Xingyuan in 902. Around that time, a strange rumor circulated around the capital, relating the name of a grand building Wang Jian had erected, “Red Mansion” (Hong lou 紅樓), to Hua Hong’s name, hinting that “painting the Red Mansion” (*hua* 畫 Hong lou) resembled “Hua Hong’s building” (Hua Hong *lou* 華洪樓). The words provoked the nervous Wang Jian, and not surprisingly, Hua was soon dismissed as governor of Shannan West, called to Chengdu, and killed without proof of guilt. Shocked soldiers wept copiously upon news of their beloved commander’s undeserved death, as though they had lost one of their own relatives.⁹² Wang Jian, too, soon realized how unreasonable the sentence was and started to worry about the military consequences. In an edict issued in 908, after his ascendance, the ruler, though still trying to justify his decision of execution, arranged for restitution of all titles for Hua Hong, seeking to appease the troops.⁹³

Ironically, sometimes the ruler’s skepticism generated positive results. When Zongbo was engaged in the campaign to unify Shannan West, he was pushed by fear of his master’s suspicion and exerted himself to achieve victory.⁹⁴ In any case, Wang Jian’s military leadership of the army was beyond challenge, as frequently proven in military conflicts with neighboring powers after the founding of the Former Shu.

Without doubt, Wang Jian’s military prowess and virtuosity deeply impressed his contemporaries. As early as the second year of Qianning 乾寧 (895), when crack troops led by Wang Zongyao were sent to Mianzhou at the summons of emperor Zhaozong to repulse the treacherous Li Maozhen, the heroic appearance of the Shu forces immediately surprised the locals.⁹⁵ And following his first military parade in 903, Wang

Jian organized a second one in Chengdu in the fall of 908, a year after he had assumed the throne. Sources celebrate the presence of three hundred thousand infantry and cavalry, soldiers holding shiny halberds, “like ferocious falcons about to deliver a fatal strike upon their quarries” (*sun ji zhi shi* 隼擊之師), as described in the words of an observer.⁹⁶

Knowing that Wang Jian controlled such a huge army in the southwest, few other potentates in this turbulent era could ignore the military and political influence of the Shu regime. Military strength played a vital role in helping Wang Jian successfully gain an advantageous diplomatic position, enabling him to achieve equal political status with the northern powers, including the Liang, with whom the Shu regime shared the Mandate of Heaven in the early tenth century.

CHAPTER 4

WARFARE AND
DIPLOMACY,
903–918

堂上謀臣帷幄，邊頭猛將干戈。天時地利与人和，燕可伐与
曰可。

*Court strategists confer at army encampments,
Border chieftains and ferocious commanders take up arms;
Assuming the right time, conditions, and context,
How long before we begin our righteous campaign?*

Liu Guo 刘过 (1154–1206), “Xijiang yue” 西江月¹

The year 907 witnessed a major turning point in both the history of Shu and the life of Wang Jian. Upon learning of Zhu Wen’s accession in north China, Wang Jian actively prepared to establish his own empire. Throughout the first half of the year, reports came from across the prefectures of numerous auspicious omens such as sweet dew, white deer, white spar-

rows, tortoises, and dragons. After careful preparations, Wang Jian was ready to ascend to the throne. That fall, following an advisor's suggestion, Wang Jian and his men all "wept" for the three successive days, a symbolic gesture to express their loyalty to the Tang and to display their great reluctance to found a new dynasty. The next day, October 10 according to the western calendar, Wang Jian formally proclaimed himself emperor of the Great Shu 大蜀.² From then on, Wang Jian started to compete with his rivals, both in war and diplomacy, under the title of emperor.

As shown in the preceding chapters, Wang Jian's crack military forces contributed greatly to his successful unification of the Three Chuan, the site of his legendary ascent from lowly captain to court-appointed governor to a prince. They also constituted a solid foundation for his later struggle to build the "Great Shu" empire as one of the most powerful regimes in the early decades of the tenth century. The sword, however, was not the only tool used by Wang Jian to accomplish his great goals. In his multivalent strategy for the founding and development of the Shu empire, diplomatic tactics and peaceful negotiations also played very significant roles. Whenever military confrontation proved ill suited to the fast-changing environment, he employed diplomacy to contain neighboring powers and maximize profit. Throughout Wang Jian's reign, the talented monarch skillfully blended military proficiency and diplomatic tact based on a sensitive grasp of changes in national politics and accurate appraisals of the changing strengths of neighboring regimes.

After examining the Shu's relations with major neighboring regimes—the Liang in the Central Plains, the Qi to the north, the Jingnan in the middle Yangzi, and the "barbarian" powers in Yunnan, one will see that "a balance of power system," a term used by Edmund Worthy in his analysis of Wu Yue's diplomacy,³ also existed in southwest China, where the Former Shu fought and negotiated with the neighboring powers at different times. As a result, the Liang, the most powerful regime in north China, officially recognized the Shu as its diplomatic equal. This equilibrium was created and maintained during the reign of Wang Jian. Content with being emperor of a small domain, he avoided unnecessary engagement in wars for the expansion of territory. By adopting this pragmatic

interstate policy, which emphasized self defense and security in dealing with surrounding powers, the founding emperor of the Former Shu voluntarily “shared” the Mandate of Heaven left by the Tang dynasty with other potentates in this complicated political environment.

SHARING THE MANDATE WITH THE LATER LIANG

As Wang Jian successfully absorbed Shannan West and extended the borders of his domain to the southern edge of the Wei River Plain in the beginning of the tenth century, he was pulled into the whirlpool of strife between the powerful Liang and a group of smaller regional regimes in North China. The power of Zhu Wen and the Liang regime had doubtless reached a new peak by the year 903, when he defeated Li Maozhen and forced the latter to return Zhaozong, a figurehead whom he could easily manipulate. Zhu concluded another successful military campaign that same summer, which brought the last disobedient governor in the lower Yellow River area into submission.⁴ Zhu Wen’s advantageous position caused worry among his adversaries and the autonomous governors, especially three of his irreconcilable enemies: Li Keyong of Jin, Li Maozhen of Qi, and Yang Xingmi of Wu. Together, they initiated a series of joint attacks on their common foe.⁵

Wang Jian, too, joined the alliance against Zhu Wen during this period, but the regional interests of Shu still motivated him. Unlike other potentates, he skillfully exploited conflicts between Zhu Wen and others while pragmatically retaining cordial relations with the Liang. The development of the relations between Shu and Liang can be divided generally into two stages separated by the year 907, when each ruler founded his respective empire. Before 907, Wang Jian showed great eagerness to collaborate with allies against Zhu Wen, the public enemy of the day, styling himself as a loyalist to the Tang court. After the Tang finally left the historical stage, Wang Jian shifted tactics, and began to actively develop diplomatic relations with the Liang.

Both of these tactics—martial engagement prior to 907 and diplomacy after 907—bore fruit for Wang Jian. On the one hand, military

campaigns prior to 907 brought additional territories that enabled Wang Jian to found his empire. On the other hand, his diplomatic contacts with the Liang effectively made his own regime in Sichuan the only polity officially sanctioned by a dynasty of the Central Plains for the entire Five Dynasties period. Thus, by skillfully manipulating warfare and diplomacy in the interactions with the Liang, the Shu under Wang Jian's rule in a unique way "shared" the Mandate of Heaven with the Liang of North China, one of the five "legitimate" and "central" powers between the Tang and Song dynasties.

The First War against the Liang, 903–904

From early 903 when Zhaozong returned to Chang'an accompanied by the armed forces of Liang, until the eighth month of 904, when the emperor was finally deposed, governors professing "loyalty" to the Tang court, including Wang Jian, organized their first round of retaliatory wars against Zhu Wen. During this period, Wang Jian acquired imperial "authorization" to appoint officials.

When Zhaozong returned on the heels of Li Maozhen's defeat in 903, the fate of the Son of Heaven, the last legitimate emperor of the Tang, was sealed. For the rest of the year, both the capital city and the palace were tightly guarded by the troops left by Zhu Wen, who, through the minister Cui Yin, his deputy at the court, manipulated all state affairs. Yet Zhu still felt constantly insecure. In early 904, his suspicion prompted him to execute Cui, and upon hearing the news that some governors in the northwest, headed by Li Maozhen, had led armies against Chang'an, Zhu Wen decided to transfer the emperor to Luoyang, the old eastern capital adjacent to his own power center in Henan, to ensure that nobody could wrest the symbol of legitimacy from his hands. On February 10, 904, Zhu ordered the evacuation of Chang'an, and the next day his soldiers drove citizens down the road to the east. The imperial cortege departed several days later. This tragic journey of 285 miles took the emperor nearly four months, during which all of his servants, reportedly more than two hundred, were murdered and replaced with Zhu Wen's retainers. After Zhaozong arrived at Luoyang that summer, a new reign era,

“Heaven’s Blessings” (Tianyou 天佑), was inaugurated, an announcement that portended the final years of the Tang empire.⁶

The transfer of the emperor caused drastic reactions from other independent warlords around China—Li Keyong, Li Maozhen, Yang Xingmi and Wang Jian, who all refused to acknowledge the dominance of the Liang. They coordinated military actions sanctioned by a secret edict from Zhaozong, who pleaded for rescue. Most autonomous governors, especially the three major opponents of Zhu Wen, received the call for help. In Chengdu, Wang Jian received two edicts from the emperor, one in the spring, when the emperor was *en route* to Luoyang, the other in early summer, just after Zhaozong entered the new capital.⁷ The touching words of the second communication, allegedly written by the emperor himself on a small piece of silk, testify to the high esteem in which Zhaozong held Wang Jian:

卿自先帝時立功，數助朕征討，受賊誣構，寧不冤憤。計此賊必先討鳳翔，次及卿於河東，然後取天下。卿安忍負高祖太宗三百年德澤，而束手黃巢餘黨？宜亟告茂貞繼徽克用行密及襄幽鎮魏，同舉勤王之師，迎朕還京。朕兵盡力窮，危及宗社，臨軒西望，瀝血告卿。

Your merit dates to the days of the former monarch, although you also conducted multiple expeditions on my behalf. So the slanders of a vile Zhu Wen must have infuriated you. He will invade Fengxiang first, I predict, then proceed with war against you and Li Keyong, after which he can claim the entire world. How could you possibly countenance the forsaking of our Tang—a dynasty of some three hundred years dating to the reigns of Gaozu and Taizong—to become a confederate of Huang Chao? Instead, you should rightfully rally governors including Maozhen, Jihui, and Keyong along with the leaders of Xiang, You, Zhen, and Wei, in a patriotic drive to restore me to the capital. My total loss of soldiers and stamina now jeopardizes the entire imperial enterprise, so I look westward from my carriage as I write this letter to you with a somber heart.⁸

Wang Jian’s response was predictable. Upon receiving the first edict, he sent an army to join the troops of Qi in the western Wei Valley, attempting to proceed to the Chang’an area. This initial allied expedition was

soon foiled by Liang defenders. A new joint campaign was launched in the sixth month of 904, this time joined by more governors from the northwest. Again, however, the allied army achieved nothing, and disintegrated quickly as Zhu Wen personally led troops to beat them back.⁹

But Wang Jian did gain something. Realizing his army could not possibly reach Chang'an in the spring, he immediately arrogated the authority to appoint his own officials following conventions adopted in emergencies, called "*mozhi chuguan* 墨制除官." Under normal circumstances during the Tang period, very strict rules and procedures existed for nominating and appointing officials, and imperial edicts could only be issued after review by special institutions at court. Edicts issued directly by the emperor without going through government channels were called "*mozhi*" or "*mochi* 墨敕" (literally, "edicts written in black ink"), which were only promulgated in special times.¹⁰ Drawing on the secret edicts he had received from Zhaozong, Wang Jian was trying to expand his authority in the name of the emperor.

Wang Jian's unique use of "*mochi*" is notable. Delegating power to appoint officials to senior commanders was not unusual in the history of the Tang, especially during wartime, when commanders in the field needed to better organize and utilize the human resources at hand to achieve victories. But this practice of "appointing officials according to the imperial edict" (*chengzhi pishu* 承制辟署) was only "for convenience" (*bianyi* 便宜) as a temporary practice, and in all cases required advance authorization from the emperor.¹¹ It became more common during the late Tang, especially from the reign of Xizong onward, when a weak court faced the threat of uprisings and militarism across the country. With strict procedures for appointments no longer observed, numerous military governors arrogated authority to confer office and privilege based on such "decrees written in black ink." For example, in spring 881, Gao Pian, the governor of Huainan, was allowed to appoint officials with "*mochi*," and several months later another senior commander, Wang Duo 王鐸 (d. 884), who was in charge of the military campaigns against Huang Chao around the capital, was also permitted to "govern at personal convenience" (*bianyi congshi* 從事).¹²

Even given the volatile military and political climate of the late Tang, Wang Jian's application of the "*mochi*" practice was highly suspect. In fact he was the first, and perhaps the only, Tang governor who seized the power to appoint officials without formal authorization from the court. One of the regional potentates of the era, Yang Xingmi, possessed this authorization yet tried to further legitimize his appointments by using an imperial envoy as a deputy of the throne. This envoy had been sent by the emperor in the winter of 902, and then took refuge in Wu after learning that Zhu Wen had killed his family and seized the emperor. It was said that anytime Yang wanted to make an appointment, he would inform the northern deputy and perform a special ritual in front of the statue of Xuanzong.¹³ Another warlord at the time, Li Keyong, also received such authorization, but the Shatuo leader insisted on reporting every appointment to the court.¹⁴ Clearly, the decision of Wang Jian to apply "*mochi*" was bolder because he received no such authorization.

Still, Wang Jian understood that he needed the symbolism of the Tang court to legitimize his actions. He insisted that all appointments issued during this period "be reported to the emperor as usual once Zhaozong returned to Chang'an" (俟車駕還長安表聞).¹⁵ Moreover, Wang Jian made another potent gesture at the same time. He refused to accept the new reign name, "Tianyou," which he and other governors regarded as an illegitimate imposition by the Liang. The whole Shu region continued to use the old "Tianfu" title in the calendar to show both loyalty to Zhaozong and antagonism to Zhu Wen.¹⁶

Of course, to legitimize his own authority in Shu, there was no better means than fighting the Liang in the name of restoring the Tang dynasty. That was exactly what Wang Jian did in the following years.

The Second War against the Liang, 905–907

The next three years were among the most crucial in Wang Jian's life, the pivotal interval in which he transformed himself from regional military governor to viable contender to claim the Mandate of Heaven. During these years, his military campaigns against the Liang, his close relationships with

other regional potentates, and his deliberate use of a claim to be a champion of the Tang cause all contributed to this successful transformation.

Zhu Wen's brutal murder of Zhaozong in the fall of 904 triggered a new round of wars. Fearing collaboration between the throne and his rivals, Zhu dispatched his favorite generals to the palace in Luoyang, who put the poor emperor to the sword on September 22. He installed a thirteen-year-old prince on the throne three days later, and the next year he ordered the slaughter of all the other princes, the remaining Tang officials, and the empress dowager.¹⁷ The final usurpation was just a matter of time.

At the same time, a cabal of anti-Liang forces resurfaced, most of the leaders having been in correspondence with each other since the transfer of Zhaozong in early 904. A series of military actions was soon carried out by the regional forces, both collectively and individually. The Shu was still very active. In the summer of 905, Wang Zonghe 王宗賀 led an armed attack against Jinzhou 金州 (today's Ankang of Shaanxi province) to the northeast of Shannan West, the base prefecture of a small command which, though still independent, had professed loyalty to Zhu Wen. The governor there could not resist the Shu troops, and soon abandoned the prefecture. Wang Jian established a new province in its place and added three prefectures from Shannan West, appointing an adopted son as governor of the new province. For the first time, Shu shared a border with the Liang. Not surprisingly, this region became an important ground upon which the two powerful regimes collided in the following years, vying for military supremacy.¹⁸ Another campaign was also launched by Wang Jian in the gorge area in early 906 to repel the Liang army.¹⁹ In the late fall of 906 Wang Jian was involved in a larger-scale military action organized by Yang Chongben 楊崇本 (also known as Li Jihui 李繼徽, d. 911), the governor of Binzhou 邠州 (today's Binxian of Shaanxi province). This allied army, reportedly of sixty thousand men, attacked a satellite prefecture of the Liang in the northwest, but suffered a huge defeat in which Yang lost most of his elite troops and from which he never recovered.²⁰ Zhu Wen's military success continued throughout 906. He suppressed disturbances in Hebei, besieged a strategic prefecture of Yan, and repelled the forces of Jin.²¹

The military setback did not prevent Wang Jian from seizing more power. He skillfully made it a cause for his own ascent. As early as the summer of 904, upon receiving news of Zhaozong's death, Wang Jian organized a grand mourning ritual for the emperor, ordering all the officials and people of Shu, including himself, to wear mourning costumes for some days.²² On November 15, 906, in Chengdu, he established an "Outer Branch of the Imperial Secretariat" (*xingtai* 行台), a special institution known in history as a temporary, emergency substitute administration for the bureaucratic organs at court. Wang Jian could thereby issue orders in the name of the Tang government. He explained: "Due to the obstruction of imperial edicts since the displacement of His Majesty to the east, I sought to establish a '*xingtai*' as a temporary expedient, following the precedents of Li Sheng and Zheng Tian to appoint officials as a surrogate for the emperor" (大駕東遷制命不通，請權立行台，用李晟鄭畋故事，承制封拜).²³

In Tang history, both the men mentioned by Wang were appointed as officials independently, without government sanction, one for pacifying a rebellion during Dezong's reign, the other in 881, when Huang Chao occupied Chang'an.²⁴ The excuse Wang Jian gave was not new, but it seemed to be reasonable enough. As a governor with standing as Palace Secretariat (*Zhongshuling* 中書令), a title conferred by the late emperor, he was justified, under emergency conditions, to act "on convenience."²⁵ Compared to the "*mochi*" adopted two years before, "*xingtai*" now provided Wang Jian with complete freedom of appointment, with no need to report to the court at all. On that day, the sources report, Wang Jian fell down on his knees facing east, the direction of the last emperor's abode, yowling and kowtowing, as a display of his reluctance to assume his new power. In the meantime, proclamations of his decision were sent to each prefecture and county of Shu.²⁶ This act indicated that Wang Jian was ready to take the last step toward his ultimate goal. Perhaps the only problem left was finding an opportune occasion.

The occasion came very soon. The very next year, the impatient Zhu Wen finally deposed the puppet Tang emperor, Aidi 哀帝 (r. 904–907), and ascended the throne on June 1, 907, founding the Liang dynasty,

conventionally known as the Later Liang.²⁷ Not a few regional powers of the day immediately accepted its authority by adopting the new Liang calendar and paying tribute to the new court, though retaining de facto autonomy within their own domains. Not surprisingly, Jin, Wu, Qi, and Shu remained hostile to the “dynasty,” which was “illegitimate” in their eyes. To show their persistent loyalty to the Tang, they continued to use the former Tang calendar and reign names. Jin and Wu reverted to “Tianyou” while Shu and Qi adopted “Tianfu,” the official reign title prior to 903.²⁸

After the Liang dynasty was founded, Wang Jian faced no further burdens because it was Zhu Wen who terminated the Tang and became the main target of Tang loyalists. Ever cautious, Wang Jian nonetheless proceeded hesitantly. During the rest of 907, he continued to undertake measures to add hues of legitimacy to his accession. That summer he sent a letter to all the other independent governors across China, calling for the establishment of a united front to restore the Tang. Nobody responded—his disingenuous gesture might have been too transparent. Then Wang Jian wrote to Li Keyong, the only powerful rival of the Liang in North China, attempting to persuade the Shatuo leader to ascend the throne together with him. “Let us reign as emperors in our respective realms; and once Zhu Wen is vanquished, we can search for a member of the imperial family to install, then revert to being governors” (請各帝一方，俟朱溫既平，乃訪唐宗室立之，退歸藩服).²⁹ The intention of Wang Jian is clear. On the one hand, by dragging a third party into the action, he could effectively diminish the pressures ensuing from his own ascendancy; on the other hand, he hoped to preserve his loyal image by drawing on the credibility of Li Keyong. Yet to his surprise, Li declined. “I swore an undying oath of allegiance [to the Tang]” (誓於此生靡敢失節), the old Shatuo leader adamantly claimed, apparently not trusting the Shu ruler. Perhaps sarcastically, Li’s reply ended with the words: “You are a man of esteemed merit in the service to our dynasty, someone privileged to be positioned amidst the august Song and Heng Mountains. You preside over the choicest of lands in all of China and possess extraordinary talents. It is appropriate for you to seek

more of the blessings of life” (唯公社稷元勳，嵩衡降祉，鎮九州之上地，負一代之宏才，合於此時，自求多福).³⁰

The lack of external support did not stop Wang Jian. Thereafter, he began to consolidate support within Shu. He issued a series of instructions to officials and people throughout his territories, aiming to establish a consensus. In the late fall of 907, Wang Jian disclosed his plan to his leading subordinates. Without any doubt, most of his advisors and generals encouraged him. As they said, “Your Majesty remains loyal to the Tang, but the Tang has fallen; thus it is Heaven that bestows [the empire], which [would bring mishaps] if not taken” (大王雖忠於唐，唐已亡矣，此所謂天與不取者也).³¹ Thus Wang Jian ascended the throne with overwhelming support. A new era of the Shu started.

Warfare with the Liang after 907

The founding of the Shu regime did not deter Wang Jian from joining military actions against the Liang in concert with other regional forces. However, the Shu army never assumed a major role in the campaigns nor individually engaged in large-scale combat with the Liang, leaving an opportunity for future reconciliation. This strategy is evident in the following events.

The first campaign occurred in the summer of 908. An alliance of anti-Liang forces, reportedly fifty thousand men, launched a fierce attack on Chang'an. Qi troops doubtless constituted the majority of this army, though most sources report that both Yang Chongben and Wang Jian lent support.³² The Qi was the only power that could possibly mobilize such numbers there, due to their proximity to Chang'an. Yang had lost most of his military two years earlier; as for Wang Jian, his participation was limited, in part due to the formidable mountains in northern Shu, and in part due to his changing attitude toward the Liang. And, according to the *Old History of the Five Dynasties*, another ally, the Jin, did not move armies southward until a few weeks later, at the order of Li Cunxu, the junior prince of the Jin who had just succeeded his father, Li Keyong, in the spring of the year. The primary role of the Qi in this campaign is also corroborated by records representing the viewpoint of the Liang, which

stress the great defeat of Li Maozhen, who in the end, “barely escaped with his life” (*jin yi shen mian* 僅以身免).³³ It seems that the armies of Jin and Shu did not even encounter Liang forces; according to one official history, their commanders chose “to return” (*yin gui* 引歸).³⁴

Three months later, another joint campaign evolved at two different locations. Allies from Qi, Shu and Binzhou attacked Chang’an again, while thirty-thousand battle-hardened troops, led by two seasoned Jin commanders, marched southward, and besieged a significant prefecture on the northwestern border of the Liang. Compared to the threat posed by the other three forces in the west, the alarm raised by the Jin army in the northwest must have been more compelling to Zhu Wen. The Liang emperor personally led troops northward to meet the Jin men. On October 17, 908, the Liang forces vanquished the troops Li Maozhen sent to aid Jin, and only one week later, the Shatuo army retreated upon learning of Zhu Wen’s arrival. No source mentions the efficacy of the Shu armies in this campaign; perhaps they had withdrawn without a fight. Clearly, the Jin army played the major role in this round of collective military action, and again, the Shu force only participated as a follower.³⁵

Military skirmishes between the Shu and the Liang did not completely cease in the following years, but in most cases were conducted by captured Liang armies on the border, rather than by Wang Jian’s own troops. Zhu Wen experienced a series of troubles in the summer of 909. First, one of his most brilliant commanders betrayed him and seized the critical region to the west of Chang’an. And when the governor of Shannan East was sent to attack a renegade in the north, his own base of Xiangzhou 襄州 (today’s Xiangyang of Hubei province) succumbed to mutiny as rebels murdered the deputy governor and declared their submission to the Shu, the closest anti-Liang power to the west. The incident had other consequences. Another prefecture in the area, located between Xiangzhou and the Shu borders also defected to Shu. However, Shu did not lend assistance to the rebels. Only one month later, Liang forces pacified the area and reoccupied both prefectures.³⁶

During the next two years, no conflicts are recorded between the two regimes. Much of Zhu Wen’s attention shifted to his northern borders.

Ongoing wars with Jin, now led by the martial genius Li Cunxu, continued in today's southern Shanxi province. The situation of the Liang deteriorated further after two previously submissive commands in Hebei joined the alliance of Jin and Yan. In the ensuing wars, Liang troops suffered more defeats than victories, as the aging and frequently sick Zhu Wen failed to repeat his early military successes.³⁷ Understandably, Zhu Wen perhaps felt, more than anytime before, an urgency to repair relations with Wang Jian. In the spring of 912, a Liang mission was sent to Chengdu, carrying an amicable letter and many gifts, which opened a new page in the history of the relations between the two regimes. On July 18 of the same year, Zhu Wen was assassinated.

Diplomatic Contacts between the Shu and the Liang

From any point of view, no one can deny that the five dynasties that succeeded one another in the Central Plains possessed advantages far surpassing those of competing regimes: they controlled vast lands, maintained authority over the traditional power center of China, and commanded more military and other resources. When Zhu Wen founded the Later Liang, he garnered support from a considerable number of autonomous regional powers, with whom his court established tributary relations on the traditional model. Although a few regimes, such as the Jin, Qi and Wu, challenged its legitimacy, the Later Liang at least nominally played the role of the "central government" with Zhu Wen as the Son of Heaven. While other potentates subsequently claimed to be emperors, the position of the Liang as the most influential power of the day was hard to challenge. It is against this background that a diplomatic protocol emerged between the Shu and the Liang.

Exchanges of envoys between the two regimes had occurred intermittently before 907. Their first diplomatic contact can be traced to late 892, a year after Wang Jian occupied West Chuan and stabilized his control by besieging Pengzhou and routing the gang of Yang Shouliang. The far-sighted Wang Jian soon showed an eagerness to build a good relationship with Zhu Wen, the most promising military star of north China at that time. A Shu envoy named Zheng Xu 鄭頊 was sent to Zhu's power

center, where he was treated respectfully by the host, who also expressed an interest in gaining an ally in the southwest.³⁸ Thereafter, good relations seem to have been maintained through the final decade of the ninth century. During the war between the Liang and the Qi in the beginning of the 900s, we are told that Zhu Wen once asked for military assistance from Wang Jian.³⁹ When the war of Liang-Qi ended in 903, Wang Jian planned to launch a new military expedition against Li Maozhen in the north of Shannan West, attempting to grab more profit from the weak Qi, which had suffered a long siege by the Liang. Perhaps around the same time, he sent an envoy to north China to develop relations with the Liang.⁴⁰ In response, Zhu Wen dispatched his emissary to Chengdu to “return the diplomatic overture” (*baopin* 報聘). And it was at this time that Wang Jian welcomed the Liang envoy to witness the grand military parade mentioned earlier.

Good relations were severed only the following year, when the ambitious Zhu Wen forced the emperor Zhaozong to leave for Luoyang, which naturally stimulated the anxieties of other warlords, including Wang Jian. The Shu joined the anti-Liang alliance and even sent some troops to the north. Nevertheless, Wang Jian’s intent was obviously not to undertake large-scale military interventions against the powerful Liang, but to take advantage of an opportunity to display loyalty to the Tang and justify the establishment of an autonomous state in Shu. Zhu Wen made some effort to restore relations. In an imperial edict of 904, composed under Zhu Wen’s influence, the Tang court reproved both Qi and Shu for their joint military actions in that year, but targeted Li Maozhen, not Wang Jian, for special rebuke.⁴¹ By differentiating Wang Jian from his major adversaries, Zhu Wen apparently intended to leave room for remedying their relations in the future.

Zhu Wen’s effort to mitigate the tension between the Liang and the Shu continued in the year after he murdered Zhaozong. He sent an envoy, Sima Qing 司馬卿, to Shu, in the name of the Tang court, to report the demise of the throne’s occupant.⁴² But in the eyes of Wang Jian, this was a dreadful juncture to form close ties with Zhu, a regicide who was widely condemned by most of the governors of the day. This envoy

was stopped on the border of Shannan West and the governor there was instructed to reply with these diplomatic words:

吾家受主上恩有年矣。衣衿之上，宸翰如新，墨詔之中，淚痕猶在。犬馬猶能報主，而況人之臣乎？自去年二月車駕東還，連貢二十表而絕無一使之報，天地阻隔，交呼何及。。。。。自聞此詔，五內糜潰。今兩川銳旅，誓雪國恥。不知來使，何以宣諭？

My family has enjoyed the favor of Your Highness for many years. The edict written on the emperor's clothes is like new, the throne's tears still visible through the ink. Even dogs and horses can feel a sense of duty to a master, let alone human servitors of their king. Since the emperor moved to the east in the second month of last year, I have submitted twenty memorials in succession, none of which received a response. Blocked by imposing natural obstacles, our shouts fail to reach their target....When I read the edict [reporting the demise of the emperor], I ached deep in the pit of my body. Now, the crack troops of Shu are all sworn to atone for the empire's dire straits, so there is nothing to discuss, should your emissary come.⁴³

Clearly, Wang Jian was still playing the role of a loyal Tang governor. Consolidating authority within his own domain was more important to his short-term goals.

The Shu's hostile and adversarial stand against Zhu Wen, however, could easily be abandoned in the new political environment. First of all, after the Tang had completely perished, both the Shu and the Liang established empires in its place. Wang Jian no longer had to oppose Zhu Wen in the name of restoring the Tang. Wang Jian's anxiety about the powerful Liang now stemmed from the military threat Zhu Wen posed to Wang's own territories. Little wonder he continued to support the Qi, the buffer regime between the Liang and the Shu in the north. But when Qi-Shu relations deteriorated several years later, Wang Jian had no reason to decline the olive branch then extended by Zhu Wen for a second time. Both emperors knew how to adjust their policies to fit the changes in diplomatic relations between states.

The exchanges of envoys between the Shu and the Liang in 912 were the most important in the history of their diplomatic relations. It was the Liang who first sent a grand envoy mission to Shu. Actually, one year earlier, Zhu Wen had already ordered a governor on the border regions to send some officials as a diplomatic vanguard, when he received news of war between Shu and Qi.⁴⁴ The embassy arrived in the summer of 912, bringing precious gifts as well as a state letter to the Shu court.⁴⁵ This letter sheds valuable light on the historic significance of the event.

且念與皇帝八兄，頃在前朝，各封異姓，土茅分裂，皆超將相之尊，魚雁往來，久約兄弟之契，歡盟甚固，功業相推。俄隔絕於音塵。。。。。。尋聞皇帝八兄奄有西陲，盡朝三蜀，別尊位號，複統高深。一時皆賀於推崇，兩國願通於情好，征曹劉之往制，各有君臣，追楚漢之前蹤，常分疆宇。所冀同清夷夏，俱活生靈。。。。。。去歲密聞風旨，遐慰寤思，憤歧隴之猖狂，逼褒斜之封徼，欲資牽制，用速掃除。。。。。。允諧犄角之謀，尤得輔車之利。。。。。。山河共永，日月長懸。

I still remember serving alongside Your Highness, my dearest Eighth Brother, under the former dynasty. The court honored us with satrapies and titles that surpassed the bounty afforded commanders and ministers. For a long time, we kept in touch by mail and established a compact as brothers, forging an inconvertible covenant to respect the merits of one another. Yet before long communications were disrupted. ...Then, I learned that Your Highness, my dearest Eighth Brother, occupied the western regions extending across the three circuits of Shu and assumed your own imperial titles as sovereign over a vast domain. I am delighted to send congratulatory emissaries, so that our two states can establish friendly relations. In the historical precedent of Cao Cao and Liu Bei [of the Three Kingdoms], we both should feel free to preside on a permanent basis over our own subjects in the manner of Chu and Han in years past. We do so in the spirit of purifying the world, barbarians and Chinese alike, to save their souls. ...Last year, I received secret news [of the war between Shu and Qi], which disturbed me incessantly. I was incensed by the mad rampage of Qi and its menacing of the Bao-Xie area. Seeking to contain the menace, I wish for you to eliminate the

intruders in a sudden raid. ... The best strategy is for us to join together [against Qi], which would be mutually beneficial. ... [Our two states will thereby] co-exist forever as mountain and river, sun and moon.⁴⁶

Two points from the letter deserve special attention. First, Zhu Wen strongly expressed his desire to resume the friendly, diplomatic relations as “brothers” which had been established and developed before 907. Noticeably, the reasons for the breakdown in relations during the final years of the Tang were hidden very skillfully in the text. Second, this diplomatic letter marked the first, and the only, time that a powerful northern dynasty in the Five Dynasties period volunteered to “divide the world” with a southern state. In the letter, two historical pairs of political entities sharing both lands and titles were proposed to analogize the Liang-Shu relationship. The Cao and Liu houses in the Three Kingdoms (220–280), controlling North China and the southwest, respectively, closely corresponded to Zhu Wen and Wang Jian during the early tenth century. And the historical allusion to Chu and Han, two powers that coexisted after the fall of Qin in the early second century BCE., fit their current situation too. More interestingly, by addressing Wang Jian as “*Huangdi ba xiong*” (“Emperor Eighth Elder Brother”), Zhu Wen deliberately expressed his modesty before his rival, implying that both of them owned the right to use imperial rhetoric. The courteous position Zhu Wen assumed was not unreasonable. His real motive is evident in the paragraph translated earlier. The Shu, with its military prowess, could be a powerful ally to counterbalance the Qi, for years his bitter enemy to the west, especially during times when Liang forces were locked in wars with the Jin and the Yan in the north. Indeed, perhaps nobody at the time was more pleased than Zhu Wen that hostilities had erupted between Qi and Shu. He even offered to provide military assistance against the Qi, but Wang Jian, due to considerations to be discussed later, declined at that time.

The lavish gifts brought by the Liang envoy testified to the great importance of this mission. They included ten steeds of different colors, sporting saddles and bridles with accents of gold, silver, and jade;

two belts made of jade, gems and horns of rhinoceros; twenty pounds of amber; two hundred pounds of hawkbill shells; several dozen ritual spears wrapped with gold and silver foil; some pairs of colored glazed bowls and other vessels decorated with gemstones and engraved with dragon and phoenix patterns; a range of exotic incenses; and thirteen different kinds of precious medicines that weighed a total of a hundred pounds.⁴⁷ As Zhu Wen's letter further noted, these precious presents were either specially purchased from the markets for this mission or selected from the tribute the Liang had received from distant countries, and were delivered expressly to "construct the friendship and to consolidate a perpetual bond between the two states" (願申兩國之情，重固千年之約).⁴⁸

The mission of the Liang, especially the modestly framed letter, must have delighted Wang Jian. But one of his sober ministers was still very cautious, appraising the letter as emblematic of a diplomatic artifice "with the [same] intent" as that of the founding emperor of the Tang, who once enticed a powerful warlord to fight enemies for him by flattering the man with a complimentary missive.⁴⁹ An incident during the reception of the Liang envoy reveals the different attitudes toward this diplomatic mission. After learning that the seal script on Zhu Wen's letter, which read "Insignia of the Great Liang for Admission to Shu" (*Da Liang ru Shu zhi yin* 大梁入蜀之印), was actually made according to the pattern used by the Tang court for its diplomatic contacts with neighboring barbarian regimes, Wang Jian flew into a rage and came close to executing the envoy. He could not tolerate such disdain from a military and diplomatic equal. But the minister dissuaded his emperor, explaining that it might be merely an oversight on the part of Liang officials, and, moreover, there was no need to turn down these overtures of sincere friendship from the Liang at this time.⁵⁰ Although sources provide no more clues as to the real reason for this lapsus calami on a seal, it was definitely not due to the negligence of clerks, as Zhang Ge conjectured. Perhaps the emperor of the Liang, despite his acknowledgment of the equal status of Shu, still aimed to retain some dignity as a ruler in the heartland of China through the use of such minutia.

The chance for Wang Jian to get some diplomatic “pay back” in the same way came very soon. Only one month after receiving Zhu Wen’s missive, news came to Chengdu of the Liang emperor’s assassination. A Shu envoy was immediately sent to Bian to offer condolences, carrying a letter stamped with a seal that read “Insignia of the Great Shu for Admission to Liang” (*Da Shu ru Liang zhi yin* 大蜀入梁之印).⁵¹ In this manner, the sensitive Wang Jian did not have to sacrifice either the rhetoric or the reality in this equal round of diplomatic intercourse.

Wang Jian had sent a carefully composed letter to Zhu Wen via the Liang envoy, who returned a few days earlier. At the time, Wang Jian had no knowledge of the death of his old rival. The main part of his reply is translated below:

大蜀皇帝致書于大梁皇帝閣下，竊念早歲與皇帝共逢昌運同事前朝，俱榮倚注之恩，並受安危之寄。豈期王室如燬，大事莫追，橫流汎濫于八方，衰興凌夷於九廟。此際與皇帝同分茅土，共統邦家，扶危者力既不宜，握兵者計無所出，建忝列同盟之分，幸居平蜀之功，所宜治甲兵以固封疆，聚征賦以修進貢，望星使而經年不至，指雲鄉而就日無期，遠聞皇帝應天順人，開基立極。。。。。。爰征史冊之文，亦有變通之說。且東漢亂離之後，三國齊興，西周微弱之時，六雄競起。俱非特強逼禪，皆以行道濟時，雍容於揖讓之前，輕重于英雄之內。況西蜀開山立國，燒棧為謀，稱雄雖處於一隅，避亂曾安於二帝。鼎峙之規模尚在，山呼之氣象猶存。永言梁蜀之歡，合認兄弟之國。

Felicitations from the Emperor of Our August Shu to the Emperor of Your August Liang: I recall in former times Your Majesty and I having the good fortune to serve together under the former dynasty, both privileged by imperial favor and deputed to save the court from danger. Neither of us expected the inalterable doom of the Tang. Chaos later spread across the eight corners of the world, the ancestral altars of the dynasty at once desecrated and reconstituted. At this time, Your Majesty and I preside in coterminous fashion as sovereigns over our respective domains. The men who attempted to rescue [the Tang court] proved deficient in military might, while men like myself with sufficient military power had no way of acting on our own strategies. Although

ranked among the allied governors, I merely attained the merit of pacifying and occupying Shu, a suitable base for training crack armies to secure the border and raise taxes as tribute [to the Tang court]. After years of sporadic communication and suspension of missions from the Tang court, I received word from afar that you had acceded to the throne and established the dynastic enterprise, consistent with the will of Heaven and the people. ... The histories are replete with arguments pertaining to accommodating change. Three Kingdoms arose after the Eastern Han succumbed to turmoil; the Six Hegemons came into contention as the Western Zhou declined. In both cases, the new rulers did not force former monarchs to abdicate, they merely delivered the age from turmoil consistent with the Way, bowing complacently before the throne and assessing men of valor with due care. Our western Shu was carved out of mountains and exploited geographic conditions to secure its interests. It may be remote in location, but it has sheltered two Tang emperors in the past and will retain its strategic and even cosmic significance in a divided world. Thereafter, the Shu and the Liang should keep friendly relations in the manner of fraternal states.⁵²

From the title and the text, we clearly see Wang Jian's effort to stress the equal political status of the two regimes. Both Zhu Wen and Wang Jian himself were addressed equally as "Emperor," both "dividing the lands in the world" and "sharing sovereignty over the country." The designations for the two regimes here, "Great Shu" and "Great Liang," indicated that the seal script the Shu used later was merely an emotional retaliation for minor details, but in formal state credentials, both the Shu emperor and his secretary who drafted the letter refused to break the rules on employing titles for diplomatic equals.⁵³ It is also apparent that Wang Jian tried to justify the ascendancies of the two former governors by comparing their days to the tumultuous Warring States (476–221 BCE) and Three Kingdoms periods, when multiple regimes coexisted and sovereignty was shared. These special circumstances, in Wang Jian's eyes, required "alternative solutions." Last, he emphasized the unique geographic position of Shu, which, though not located in the middle part of China like the Liang, still possessed all the advantages of previous regimes founded

there and thus deserved a share of the mandate in the contemporary age of chaos. The Shu and the Liang, Wang Jian added, should be friendly states, “brothers,” echoing the term used by Zhu Wen.

In the following years, the friendly relationship between the two states continued. One envoy mission from Liang reached Chengdu in 916, a critical year when the Jin seized the Liang’s territories in Hebei.⁵⁴ It was in these years that the power of the Shu reached an unprecedented height. Without needing to worry about the military threat of the Liang, Wang Jian could organize all his elite forces to squeeze the Qi’s territories to the north and expand his own lands. In contrast, the Liang dynasty left by Zhu Wen seemed less lucky. After Zhu was assassinated in 912, the once-powerful regime soon devolved into a combination of internecine strife and external invasion. The new emperor, Zhu Yougui 朱友珪 (r. 912–913), was murdered in a mutiny the following year and his position was filled by Zhu Youzhen 朱友貞, known in history as Modi 末帝 (Last Throne, r. 913–923). Some powerful generals of the Liang broke away from its control, and not a few “vassals” who had formerly accepted Liang authority quickly renounced their allegiance to its court. Moreover, its bitter enemy the Jin gradually took advantage of a weak palace to occupy most of Hebei.⁵⁵ Clearly, what the Shu gained through diplomatic intercourse proved more enduring than the gains of the Liang.

By studying diplomatic relations between the Shu and the Liang during the late ninth and early tenth centuries, we might learn more about the pragmatic concerns behind interstate relations in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods. As an age of chaos, the period was known in Chinese history for border disputes, military strife and conquests, and endless conflicts between regional powers. Admittedly, warfare often shaped relations between states. But the opposite occurred in other contexts. Between most independent powers of the day, with or without a shared border, diplomatic relations were established, maintained and developed, which in many ways significantly shaped the political environment of the time.

Exchanging envoys to develop diplomatic relations (*jiaopin* 交聘), was already very common among the independent powers during the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. As mentioned earlier, autonomous

TABLE 1. Envoy exchanges between the Former Shu and the Later Liang.

<i>Year/month</i>	<i>Liang envoys to the Shu</i>	<i>Shu envoys to the Liang</i>
892		Zheng Xu 鄭頊
901		Pan Wan 潘崐
903		Wei Zhuang 韋莊
903/4	Wang Yin 王殷	
905/11	Sima Qing 司馬卿	
911	messengers sent by Liu Xu 劉鄩	
912/5	Lu Pin 盧玘	
912		Li Hong 李紘
916/1	Feng Shunqing 封舜卿	

Sources. The detailed sources and discussions of the dates of these diplomatic missions have been provided in the notes in chapter 4. Here I only list the sources that record the envoys’ missions: Zheng Xu (ZZTJ 259.8438 and BMSY 16.302), Pan Wan (BMSY 16.302), Feng Shunqing (TPGJ 257.2004), Wang Yin (ZZTJ 264.8607), Wei Zhuang (BMSY 15.291), Sima Qing (ZZTJ 265.8652), messengers sent by Liu Xu (JLQJZ 6.1b), Lu Pin (ZZTJ 268.8751 and XWDS 2.20, 63.788–9), and Li Hong (XWDS 63.788–9).

Note. According to BMSY (5.105), Xue Tinggui (d. 925) also served as a Liang envoy to the Shu sometime after 907, when he brought an edict from the Liang emperor to confer a grand office on Wang Jian (冊蜀先主為司徒). But this mission is not mentioned by Xue’s biographies in JTS (190C.5080) and JWDS (68.899–900), in fact both works only record his travel to Shu in 896; and his biography in the XTS (203.5794), though apparently citing some information from BMSY, does not record the mission after 907 either. More importantly, the Shu could not accept such a title from an equal and rival like the Liang. Thus Xue’s mission as recorded by BMSY should not be true and is not listed here.

governors used messengers to communicate with one another and build alliances against Zhu Wen since 904. Interstate contacts through diplomatic envoys continued in a different political context after 907. Nearly all powers had officials in charge of diplomatic affairs through such institutions as a “Department of Visiting Guests” (Kesheng 客省 or Kesi 客司).⁵⁶ Missions received much more attention from potentates eager to enter alliances and weaken enemies. Sending or accepting envoys from beyond one’s borders was seen as a gesture to develop good

relationships, as illustrated by the Liang-Shu exchanges. In another example, when Zhu Wen received a report from his envoy that the Zhao 趙 state (883–921), which had accepted Liang authority at that time, had also accepted a mission from the Jin amidst a mourning sacrifice in its capital, the sensitive emperor had to question the loyalty of his supposed ally, who eventually did turn into a renegade.⁵⁷

Under the new circumstances, envoy exchanges carried great symbolic weight in interactions among the numerous rival potentates vying to legitimate their claims to be the Son of Heaven. The rhetoric of the missives, the protocol observed by both the envoy and the host state—even the gifts exchanged and the titles used to address each other—every gesture was pregnant with symbolic resonance. Understandably, as the representative of his ruler, an envoy's words and manners during his mission embodied the attitude of his own state toward the host regime. Similarly, the nature of the host state's welcome and accommodation of the envoy reflected the status of the envoy's state. A slight mistake in reception, an inappropriate form of epistolary address, or any deliberate violation of etiquette might precipitate military conflict and ruin the fragile relations between states. For instance, the emperor of Yan executed a Jin envoy in 912 for breach of protocol. The envoy employed diplomatic language suited not to an emperor but to a vassal peer, which soon produced a war between the two states.⁵⁸ It is in this context of highly sensitive diplomacy that we might better understand Wang Jian's reaction to the Liang mission in 912. In the diplomatic intercourse between a pair of political, military and diplomatic equals, such as the Liang and the Shu, the rhetoric contained the same significance as reality itself.

Yet notwithstanding this sensitivity, Five Dynasties states strategically employed diplomatic flexibility and pragmatism. In contrast to the dominant traditional system of foreign relations in Tang times between the central Chinese government and foreign neighbors that accepted its superiority on most occasions, interstate relations during the tenth century were conducted in a new political context. From the beginning of the tenth century until the rise of the Song dynasty, many kingdoms, empires and other autonomous regimes coexisted in China, and not a

few of them claimed to have inherited the legitimacy of the Tang. Yet “every claim to that heritage, if not obviously hollow, was greeted with suspicion and was challenged by some other, rival claim.”⁵⁹ Moreover, with the political confusion in China proper, a powerful nomadic group known as Kitans also established their own empire in the far north and often challenged the supremacy of the rulers in the Central Plains. China during this period had no true central government and no single regime could claim incontestable support from other powers. Each state developed its foreign or domestic relations on the basis of its own interests and in reality acted as a diplomatic equal to others in this multistate system.

The new circumstance forced rulers of the day to finesse the gap between rhetoric and reality in their interactions with one another. In this multistate system, rulers who dogmatically insisted on higher standards of protocol in diplomacy but never realistically measured their own capacities, like the ruler of Yan mentioned earlier, would not survive long.⁶⁰ Rather than insisting upon high-sounding rhetoric, some smart potentates of smaller states, such as Qian Liu of Wu Yue, chose to pragmatically manipulate their relations with more powerful regimes in China for their own advantage.⁶¹ Even regimes with bigger lands and more forces, such as the Later Liang and the Former Shu, preferred to acknowledge each other and maintain the status quo.

Moreover, both the Liang and the Shu were merely “lesser empires” and possessed neither the capacity to conquer the other and unify China nor the absolute legitimacy to justify their emperor’s ascendance as Son of Heaven. The best, perhaps the only, way to survive and counterbalance challenges from neighboring enemies was to accept the other as an equal in both rhetoric and reality, so that both sides could maximize their interests, affirm their own existence as “legitimate” polities, and share the Mandate of Heaven as “sibling states.” Although on some occasions the emperor of Shu might have dreamed of unifying China, like all other ambitious rulers in the divided ages of Chinese history, Wang Jian never risked the empire he had in hand to obtain something more unrealistic.

At a feast on the day of the grand military parade in 908, Wang Jian, with inflated confidence after reviewing his crack troops, boasted that,

“If I had one or two great generals like Han Xin to command forces, the Central Plains could be easily conquered” (得一二人如韓信而將之，中原不足平也). Hearing these words, the pretentious Wang Zongji went down on his knees and volunteered to lead the charge. Yet this dangerous thought immediately invited opposition from other sober officials at the feast. A minister named Zhang Fu 張扶 straightforwardly expostulated, “Even Your Majesty, an extraordinary military talent, could not win a slice of land from Qi-Long, let alone the hubristic Zongji; I wish Your Majesty would not overly concern yourself with the Central Plains anymore” (陛下雄才大略尚不能得歧隴尺寸之土，宗佺小子狂妄，願陛下無以中原為意).⁶² Obviously, most officials favored the use of peaceful tactics in dealing with the powerful Liang, and the idea of adopting practical policies based on the Shu’s capacity and location was shared by the emperor and his men.

THE QI: A SCREEN TO THE SHU

Among Wang Jian’s neighboring powers, Li Maozhen’s Qi played a unique part in the Shu empire’s formation and development. To Wang Jian, this small yet vibrant regime fulfilled different roles during different periods: a bellicose military rival which contended with the Shu for territories in southwest China, a significant political ally with which the Shu could stand side by side to challenge the hegemony of the rising powers in North China, a buffer zone and a safety screen between Sichuan and the Central Plains to protect Shu from the threat of the powerful Liang, and moreover, a launching pad from which he could grab more lands by force on opportune occasions. The role of the Qi as an autonomous power through the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods has been underestimated in historical writing since the Song dynasty. Noticeably, it was not counted in the traditional category of the “Five Dynasties and Ten States.” The reasons for this exclusion might be conjectured: the ruler of Qi never ascended the throne and declared his domain an “empire;” also, Qi’s autonomy did not last very long due to its prompt assimilation into the Later Tang. However, comparing the Qi to

other contemporary regimes in that category shows that neither reason is sufficient justification for such exclusion. Rather, considering its sizable territory, longstanding independence, and conspicuous influence during the political transitions at the turn of the tenth century, the Qi should be placed on equal footing with any regime among the “Wudai shiguo.”⁶³

From any point of view, the ruler of Qi, Li Maozhen, became a legend in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods. Originally an inferior soldier known as Song Wentong 宋文通, stationed at Fengxiang, he quickly exhibited his military talents in the pacification of the Huang Chao rebellion and was promoted to captain in the imperial Shence Army in the early 880s. The extraordinary merit he achieved during the second exile of Xizong, in 886, helped him win his first appointment as governor, as well as the bestowal of a new name with the imperial surname Li. It must have been during this period that Li met his lifelong rival Wang Jian, a colleague in the Shence Army. In the following year, Li took the governorship at Fengxiang, a small yet very significant command where he soon amassed a great fortune.⁶⁴

Li Maozhen's early success resulted from several factors. Geographic location was one of the most important advantages that he enjoyed at that time. The core region of his domain, historically known as Qi, stretched across the western edge of today's Shaanxi province, a traditionally wealthy and strategic area with several crucial routes connecting the inner Guanzhong region, where the capital was located, to the vast northwest and Shu to the south. His base of Fengxiang, one of the five “grand prefectures” (*fu* 府) in the high Tang period, was located less than a hundred miles west of Chang'an, a strategic hub appraised by a famous literatus of the day as “the most crucial city for securing the capital from the right” (鳳翔右輔之地，最為重鎮).⁶⁵

The powerful military forces that Li Maozhen commanded constituted another important factor in his fortunes as an upstart in this chaotic era. An experienced commander whose position had been gained through fighting, he held the power of the sword in high esteem. He developed a strong army, including units of cavalry and infantry, in his domain, and further strengthened it by incorporating a large number of mounted

warriors from the imperial army in 892 and mobilizing local militias in large-scale military actions.⁶⁶ Like Wang Jian and other contemporary military governors, Li Maozhen adopted capable generals as “fake sons” to help control the troops. Some of them were appointed as deputy governors in the newly acquired commands.⁶⁷ It should be noted that support from below must also have contributed to Li Maozhen’s long-time domination over the region. Sources report that he had a “clement” nature and always treated subordinates leniently, which surely helped win the loyalty of his troops.⁶⁸

Relying on his geographical advantage and his surging military power, the ambitious Li Maozhen swallowed his neighboring prefectures one by one in the next five years. He thereby gained a great influence over a number of commands in the Guanzhong area. His power reached its apex when he seized Shannan West in the fall of 892.⁶⁹ The honors and titles he acquired from the court were also stunning. His first princely title was conferred no later than 890, far earlier than those of many of his rivals; a few years later two further princeships were bestowed successively.⁷⁰ It was in the year 901 that the emperor bestowed on him the highest honor of Prefect of the Imperial Secretariat (Shangshuling 尚書令), an office that was rarely awarded to officials throughout the Tang history because the great emperor Taizong had held this position before his accession to the throne.⁷¹

As he sought to expand his authority by dominating court politics and bullying the weak occupant of the throne at Chang’an, Li Maozhen’s power soon met great challenges from three other powerful warlords, the rulers of the Jin, Liang and Shu. As mentioned earlier, his military adventures against the court in 895 and 896 invited the intervention of Li Keyong, who led his formidable Shatuo army and repelled the allied troops of Qi and its confederates. Wang Jian, too, grabbed the opportunity to cripple Qi’s influence in the northern and eastern Sichuan area. The fatal strike on Li Maozhen came only a few years later, when he intervened in the fierce power struggle at court involving Zhu Wen. Li Maozhen’s abduction of Zhaozong at the end of 901 triggered a conflict between these men that did not end until early 903. During this protracted

military campaign, Li Maozhen suffered huge losses. His base, Fengxiang, was besieged for months, and most of its satellite prefectures were conquered by the Liang army. The domain still under his control experienced unprecedented devastation and his military shrank considerably. As a result, his armies were reduced to predatory tactics, frequently collecting provisions by looting local villages.⁷² During the war, Li Maozhen's territory in Shannan West was annexed by Wang Jian.

Compared to losses of territory, compromises in honor seemed more humiliating to the Qi governor. In the second month of 903, upon receiving a letter from Zhu Wen, the defeated Li Maozhen was compelled to return the princess whom his son had married days earlier.⁷³ Apparently Zhu did not want his rival to maintain any familial connection with the throne, which might be taken as a token of imperial favor and used as an avenue to resume power. In the summer of that year, Li Maozhen insisted that the court remove his glorious title, Prefect of the Imperial Secretariat, fearful it might provoke the jealousy of Zhu Wen, whose highest office in the Tang regime was one rank lower.⁷⁴

The chance for the stalwart Li Maozhen to repay his enemy soon arrived. With the transfer of emperor Zhaozong to Luoyang, Zhu Wen immediately became the target of a group of independent governors who intended to curb Liang power in the name of loyalty to the Tang. Li Maozhen gradually recovered some of his former territories and, seeing the opportunity to retaliate against his bitter enemy, actively organized a series of joint military actions against the Liang. It was during this period that Qi and Shu, once military opponents in East Chuan and Shannan West, became close allies and initiated a series of attacks on the fringes of Chang'an.

The year 904 marked the turning point in relations between the Shu and the Qi. Wang Jian decided to associate with Li Maozhen to antagonize the aggressive Liang. The reasons for this critical change in his policies regarding the Qi can well be imagined. First, as a governor who always styled himself a Tang loyalist, Wang Jian could not sit by apathetically upon receiving the pleading edicts sent by Zhaozong. He surely understood that his participation in the anti-Liang bloc both

promoted his public image in the country and furthered his legitimate claim to control over his domain in Shu. Moreover, the Liang posed a potential threat to his own territory. The Liang's formidable military strength had already proven triumphant over the Qi a year earlier, and further aggressive expansion to the west and the south could be expected. Without a formidable military ally like Qi securing the north, the territory of the Shu, and Shannan West in particular, would be vulnerable to the Liang.

Perhaps Wang Jian's worry began much earlier, in 892, when he learned from his envoy to the Liang that Zhu Wen had expressed an interest in the topography of Shu. During the mission, the Shu emissary was asked by the host about the Sword Gate, the strategic site covering the entry into the Chengdu Plain. "Extremely dangerous," the envoy answered, apparently noting Zhu's ambition and attempting to discourage him. The rising warlord burst out laughing, as if doubting the reply, then queried, "then how did your lord get across?"⁷⁵ At that juncture, Zhu Wen was not strong enough, and Wang Jian was contending with Li Maozhen for East Chuan and Shannan West. Understandably, the vehement strife between the Shu and the Qi before 903 was more urgent than the potential conflict with the Liang. But when the political situation changed and the old balance of power was broken, the Liang surpassed the Qi to become the most threatening rival to the Shu. Thus, the existence of Qi turned out to be a perfect buffer zone to screen Wang Jian's own regime from the north. For this reason, when Li Maozhen called for joint action against the Liang, Wang Jian took the opportunity to express his loyalty by sending troops. After all, the gains would be greater than the losses. As mentioned earlier, the Shu expeditionary army was never the leading force and could retreat to Shannan West whenever actions failed, leaving Qi troops behind to endure counterattacks from the Liang.

The new policy in dealing with the Qi, however, was not unanimously embraced within the Shu camp. Actually, a sharp divergence of opinion existed between the military and civilian bureaucrats in the summer of 904. While several commanders urged Wang Jian to attack Fengxiang by exploiting its weakness, Feng Juan 馮涓, one of the most important

advisers of the Shu, strongly opposed such an inadvisable action and warned it would result in disaster. After enumerating the possible economic losses that might result from the war, Feng gave an analysis of the current political situation and the potential danger Shu might face:

今梁王朱全忠霸盛，強據兩京，料其先取河東。河東，梁之敵國也，勢不兩立。倘一處為雄，率天下之眾，一舉西來，縱諸葛重生，五丁複出，無以泥封大散，石鎖劍門。

Presently, the Prince of Liang stands at the peak of his hegemonic powers, occupying the two capitals by force of arms. I anticipate that he will first attack Hedong (Li Keyong's Jin), his deadly enemy. Hedong and Liang, as bitter enemies, cannot possibly coexist. The power that achieves dominance will command the bulk of the world's armed forces in a drive on the west, making it impossible to defend the Sword Gate and Dasan Pass, even if the likes of Zhuge Liang and the Five Bullies were alive again.

Thus, Qi's location between Shu and the Liang was critical to the survival of Shu, and a good relationship with Li Maozhen at this time was more necessary than ever. So Feng Juan continued to make suggestions:

今秦庭實蜀之巨屏也。去其屏，窺見庭館焉。莫若與秦王和親，稍稍以麻布茗草給之，不傷于大義，濟之以小利。蜀但訓兵秣馬，因敵料強，足可以保天祿於三川，固子孫于萬葉。潛令公主探其機密，窺彼室家，俟便攻之，一舉而獲可也。

The region of Qin (Qi), in our day, serves as a giant screen for Shu. Its seizure will allow the Liang to easily reach Shu. No strategy is sounder than one that establishes a marriage alliance with the Prince of Qin, while plying him with gifts of textiles and tea. Modest sums can achieve goals without harm to higher principle, allowing us in Shu to train armies to defend against our enemies. Such a strategy will suffice to guarantee the preservation of the heavenly mandate in the larger Shu region and protect our progeny for ten thousand years. Moreover, our princess can access the state secrets of Maozhen and spy on his family so that we can attack at an opportune moment and capture Maozhen in a single stroke.⁷⁶

This convincing proposal was immediately accepted by Wang Jian, who turned to the militant generals and explained: “Though merely a mediocre man with no talent, Li Maozhen won fame for his intrepidity and was held in awe by his neighbors. Although unable to contend by force with Zhu Wen, [his strength] is still more than sufficient to defend himself. It will benefit us a lot if we use [his domain] as our shield” (茂貞雖庸才，然有強悍之名，遠近畏之，與全忠力爭則不足，自守則有餘，使為吾藩蔽，所利多矣).⁷⁷

Based on this policy, the Shu abandoned their former aggressive policy toward the Qi and replaced it with a pragmatic one, designed to support the neighbor against their shared foe. Besides joining the campaigns to pressure the Chang’an region, several other steps that had been outlined by Feng Juan were applied to enhance this good relationship. In the sixth month of 904, Wang Jian agreed to marry his daughter, Princess Jinci 晉慈, to Li Maozhen’s nephew Li Jichong 繼崇, the governor at Qinzhou 秦州 (today’s Tianshui of Gansu province). The bride was sent to the north accompanied by a large retinue of attendants transporting a lavish dowry, “the grand procession continuing hundreds of miles” (導從華麗，已逾千里), a source boasts.⁷⁸ Moreover, in the following years, Shu tried to satisfy Li Maozhen’s every request, either for goods or munitions. Trade between the two regions was bolstered too, consisting mainly of cloth, salt and tea, and contributing handsomely to the revenue of Wang Jian’s government.⁷⁹

Understandably, the importance of close relations with the Shu was also fully recognized by the Qi. Two years after the marriage alliance, during the days when a new round of military action against Zhu Wen was about to start, Li Maozhen sent his own son, Song Kan 宋侃, to Shu as a hostage, in order to show his desire to maintain the friendship.⁸⁰ Li Maozhen’s urgent need for more military and economic aid was apparent. Due to the sensitive location of his domain, he had to endure much more pressure from the Liang than any other rival at that time. Qi seems to have experienced great difficulties over the next three years. The debacles at the end of 906 had seriously crippled the Qi, who proved unable to raise sufficient resources to launch a new war in the

early summer of 908, when the ruler of the Jin, Li Cunxu, asked for military assistance.⁸¹ But Li Maozhen's persistence was remarkable. He struggled to survive and maintain full independence, proving Wang Jian's earlier prediction. After learning that Zhu Wen had proclaimed himself emperor, the hard-bitten potentate of Qi also openly promoted his own status by adopting elaborate imperial institutions for his small domain, appointing a full cohort of courtiers, changing the tablets of his dwellings to read "palace," and addressing his wife as "empress." In this way, he actually founded a miniature "empire" and became its monarch without a crown.⁸²

For a short period, a temporary balance of power was conspicuously formed in northwest and southwest China between the three centers of authority, the Shu, the Liang and the Qi, each enjoying autonomy and imperial or semi-imperial privileges. Although hostilities between the Liang and the Qi-Shu alliance continued to exist, neither side attempted to launch a large-scale aggressive attack to destroy this balance. The Liang turned its attention to its northern border to confront its deadly enemy, the uncompromising Jin. Lacking strength to challenge the Liang, Qi was still trying to recover its former legacy in the northwest. Stable and wealthy, the Shu empire under Wang Jian showed no interest in further expanding its territory at this time, enjoying the safety and prosperity brought by its remote location and its buffer in the north.

Once power relations changed, however, this tripodal balance did not last long. Warfare erupted again, not against external enemies, but between the allies. It was conflict between the Qi and the Shu in 911 that finally altered geopolitics in the southwest and greatly influenced the fates of all the three regimes.

Li Maozhen breached the alliance first. As soon as his strength recovered slightly, in early 909, his aggressive nature resurfaced. Taking advantage of the turmoil of a command in northern Shaanxi, the Qi army seized control of Yanzhou 延州 (today's Yan'an of Shaanxi province), a region previously contained within Li Maozhen's dominions. This action prompted Liang military intervention, which sent troops to the region, driving away the Qi army and even conquering a number of prefectures

farther south.⁸³ Yet, to the surprise of both sides, the position of the Qi amazingly improved that summer, when a senior Liang commander betrayed Zhu Wen. The renegade Liu Zhijun 劉知俊 (d. 917) was well known for his extraordinary military talent, which earned him sobriquets like “Unrivaled Lord” (*Wudi wang* 無敵王) and “Trailbreaker Liu” (*Liu kaidao* 劉開道). He had led nearly all the campaigns against the Liang’s rivals along the northwest borders in the past five years, rarely meeting defeat.⁸⁴ Fearing the suspicion of the Liang emperor, Liu revolted. His defection changed the power equation in Guanzhong suddenly, even leading to his temporary occupation of Chang’an, which was only recovered by the Liang after Zhu Wen himself joined the punitive expedition. Liu Zhijun fled to Fengxiang, where the military genius was well treated. The arrival of such an able general kindled Li Maozhen’s passion for new territorial expansion. In the late summer of 909, Liu Zhijun led a Qi army to Lingzhou 靈州 (today’s Zhongning of Ningxia), an ideal area to pasture military horses. Although the mission was not successful due to the military diversion of the Liang, Liu still exhibited his ability in a great victory over the Liang army at the end of the year.⁸⁵ Over the next two years, Li Maozhen endeavored to expand his territory with the aid of Liu: mounting one campaign in the summer of 910 to besiege Xia-zhou 夏州 (today’s Jingbian of Shaanxi province) to the north, and another in the spring of 911 for a new attack on Chang’an.⁸⁶

Given the Qi’s aggressive expansion, a war with the Shu was almost inevitable. A breach in relations even appeared in early 910, a year in which the avaricious requests of the Qi seemed unbearable to Wang Jian. By one account, after soliciting goods and other support with increasing frequency, Li Maozhen even brazenly begged for two prefectures in Shannan West. This egregious request vexed Wang Jian, causing him to comment at court, “I have treated Maozhen with due hospitality; I would rather offer him more goods than give away the land and abandon my people” (吾奉茂貞勤亦至矣，若與之地，是棄民也，寧多與之貨).⁸⁷ Obviously the emperor still hoped to maintain the relationship. The final blow to the alliance came only one year later, caused by the return of the Shu Princess Jinci. Jinci sent a messenger to Chengdu in the beginning

of 911, complaining of the turbulent situation in Qinzhou, then governed by her husband, Li Jichong, a presumptuous and incompetent man. Her father immediately summoned his daughter back to Chengdu. The princess returned and stayed home, with no intention of going back.⁸⁸ The extended sojourn of princess Jinci in Chengdu, obviously violating matrimonial propriety, infuriated and humiliated Li Maozhen. The incident provided a good pretext to sever the alliance, which perhaps had been expected by both sides. While Li Maozhen intended to launch an invasion into Shannan West, Wang Jian, who might have deliberately irritated the Qi by holding Jinci, was also waiting for an opportunity to punish his demanding northerly neighbor.

In the spring of 911, receiving a report that Qi troops had gathered on his border, Wang Jian immediately sent out a large army, of a reported one hundred twenty thousand troops, to reinforce Shannan West. There the armies clashed. The Shu won some victories at first, and at one time the emperor himself even paid a short visit to the northern borders. But a decisive battle on September 19 ended in a rout for the Shu army: one of Wang Jian's adopted sons died in the retreat and the remaining Shu troops withdrew to Xingyuan, which was soon besieged by the pursuing Qi army led by Liu Zhijun. This disadvantageous situation was only alleviated when the emperor sent more relief units, but the conflict did not turn in the Shu's favor until Wang Jian himself joined the war in the early winter. Then the Qi invaders were routed, with nearly forty strongholds destroyed and over fourteen thousand troops killed or captured.⁸⁹

When Wang Jian returned to Chengdu from the battlefield at the end of 911, he assumed the esteemed title of the "Resplendently Martial, Profoundly Sagacious, Divinely Accomplished, Literary and Moral, Radiant and Filial Emperor" (英武睿聖神功文德光孝皇帝), which might indicate his intention to prove his might and authority through warfare.⁹⁰ On the Qi side, the invincible commander Li Zhijun was stripped of his military leadership at the end of the war. His prowess had stirred the suspicion of Li Maozhen and incurred the jealousy of other Qi generals.⁹¹

The conflict between the two regimes continued in the following years. With the reestablishment of good relations with the Liang in 912,

Wang Jian adopted a more aggressive policy toward his former ally, whose role as a buffer for protecting Shu no longer seemed so important. On January 14, 913, the Shu army launched attacks, beginning a campaign to annex the Qin-Long 秦隴 region in today's southern Gansu and western Shaanxi provinces. The seesaw battles around the region were bloody and long lasting, and it took three years for the Shu army to vanquish the resistance. By the end of 915, the Shu achieved great victories in two places around the same time, one army sweeping all the way to Qinzhou in the far north, where the governor, the husband of Princess Jinci, surrendered; the other army conquering Fengzhou, a major city along the Shudao, only eighty miles southwest of Fengxiang.⁹² The trophies from the victories were abundant, including over three thousand horses, nearly ten thousand captured troops and sixty thousand households. More than fifty Qi generals in the region surrendered too, including Li Jichong and Liu Zhijun.⁹³ The gains in territory were even more important. Two new commands, Wuxing 武興 (at Fengzhou) and Tianxiong 天雄 (at Qinzhou), were set up in the new area, tremendously enlarging the realm of Shu, which thereafter became the second largest southern state of the day and the third largest among the "Ten States" for the entire Five Dynasties period.⁹⁴

The diplomatic mission of the Liang in early 916 further confirmed the good relationship between the two empires, which might explain Wang Jian's decision to continue military expansion into Qi. In the fall of the year, a massive Shu army advanced against the core region of Qi from two directions simultaneously, one part heading from Qinzhou to Longzhou 隴州 (today's Longxian of Shaanxi province), the other from Fengzhou to Fengxiang. Victories were achieved in both places: in the north, the Qi governor at Longzhou abandoned the city and surrendered with twenty thousand soldiers; and in the south, more than ten thousand Qi troops were vanquished, as Li Maozhen weathered a siege at Fengxiang for the second time in his life. The Shu army retreated only when a winter storm struck the region.⁹⁵ Wang Jian continued his efforts to destroy the Qi over the next two years. By this time, Wang Jian was in his seventies and beset by endless illnesses and succession problems.

Yet even late in his life, he seemed more thirsty than ever for military victories to prove his invincibility.⁹⁶

As Li Maozhen encountered deadly military aggression on two fronts, from both the Liang and the Shu, the doom of the Qi seemed inevitable. During the years after the breaking of the Qi-Shu alliance in 911, Li Maozhen's domain shrank dramatically. Binzhou surrendered to the Liang in 915 after the death of Yang Chongben, exposing the entire core region of Qi to Liang armies. In the same year, the Shu conquered the Qin-Feng region, and, one month later, two prefectures in the east of Fengxiang capitulated to Liang troops, followed by the loss of another two prefectures in the north to the Liang.⁹⁷ Only seven prefectures were actually controlled by Li Maozhen by this time, as the *New History of the Five Dynasties* reports.⁹⁸

In the early summer of 918, the ill-fated Li Maozhen sent an envoy to Chengdu, begging for a truce.⁹⁹ No sources indicate whether Wang Jian accepted the plea or not. The monarch died two months later. His successor inherited the policy of hostility to the Qi, oblivious to the hazard of losing this strategic buffer zone. Danger came quickly as a new power structure overtook the Central Plains.

SPLITTING THE GORGES: SHU AND JINGNAN

Another important neighbor of Shu was Jingnan, which had shared a border with Wang Jian to the east along the gorges region of the upper Yangzi River since 897. A longstanding independent command from the final years of the Tang through the Five Dynasties period, Jingnan has been recognized as one of the "Ten States" in official historical writings since Song times, despite its small size (only three prefectures at the onset of Song conquest) and its lack of any real "kingdom" status.¹⁰⁰ Three potentates had succeeded as leaders of this small command during Wang Jian's domination over Shu, two before the founding of the Shu empire and one after, and all three contended with Shu for control of the strategic area around the gorges. Examining military and diplomatic contacts between the two regimes reveals the unique strategies Wang Jian

adopted to better secure his domain, again demonstrating his pragmatic attitude in dealing with neighbors with whom he “collaborated” to create and maintain the balance of power in the upper Yangzi in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods.

The conflicts between the two powers mainly centered on the grand gorges of the upper Yangzi. This artery had long been vital to the Tang government for transporting resources from Shu to central China. For Wang Jian, the gorges area was of vital importance because the torrent and its many tributaries formed the only water route into inner Shu, which otherwise was only accessible by crossing the formidable mountain barriers through Shudao from the north.¹⁰¹ For Jingnan, the region was also pivotal for both national security and residential expansion. Thus, fierce contention for domination of the area could hardly be avoided.

First established in 757, the Jingnan Command once administered a sizable region of more than a dozen prefectures.¹⁰² Straddling the upper and middle Yangzi River, it functioned as a connection to the Tang heartland, linking the upper and lower Yangzi, north and south China. This geographic importance was highlighted in an appointment decree of the mid ninth century: “[Jingnan] controls the south of Jing, connects the entire Shu, guards roads to the five ranges [of Lingnan], and holds the key area of seven lakes [of Hunan]” (地控南荊，土連全蜀，扼五嶺之通道，當七澤之要衝).¹⁰³ Its location made Jiangling 江陵 (today’s Jingzhou of Hubei province), the seat of Jingnan, one of the most populous and attractive trade centers in China at that time.¹⁰⁴ Through the eighth and ninth centuries, the Tang government exercised relatively effective control over the area, but the situation changed after the Huang Chao rebellion. In 879, peasant armies occupied Jiangling, burning and looting the area. During the years that followed, various warlords annexed the prefectures in the Jingnan command, and the exiled Xizong in Sichuan subsequently recognized the authority of these military men. The turbulence continued. In 885, the ferocious warlord Qin Zongquan in Henan sent his army southward, first seizing Shannan East and then besieging Jiangling. The city fell two years later, with its suburbs devastated.¹⁰⁵ By the time Jiangling was finally stabilized under a capable

governor in 888, only “seventeen households” inhabited the once flourishing city, sources report.¹⁰⁶

Cheng Rui 成汭 (d. 903) was the first Jingnan potentate to extend his territory up to the gorges. Hailing from the north, he rose to power in 885 by seizing Guizhou 歸州 (today’s Zigui of Hubei province), a prefecture on the north bank of the middle Yangzi, where he established a crack army. Three years later he occupied Jiangling and successfully obtained an official appointment as governor from the Tang court. Facing a devastated land, he endeavored to reinvigorate the local economy by attracting refugees, encouraging land reclamation and fostering interregional trade. These constructive policies distinguished Cheng Rui from the rapacious warlords of the day, who destroyed the economic infrastructure by plundering and seeking short-term profit, more often than building it up by promoting farming and trade. No wonder contemporaries praised him for this merit. The complimentary saying “Han in the north and Guo in the south” (*bei Guo nan Han* 北韓南郭), associated him with Han Jian, the capable governor of Huazhou in North China who also paid a lot of attention to developing the economy of his domain.¹⁰⁷ With the quick recovery and development of the local economy, Cheng Rui acquired the resources to build a larger military including a formidable navy, with which he soon initiated an ambitious plan of territorial expansion. Not surprisingly, the gorges region of the upper Yangzi to the west of Jiangling became his first target.

Following the river westward in the early 890s, Cheng Rui’s troops first seized Kuizhou 夔州 (today’s Fengjie of Chongqing), the prefecture at the western end of the gorges. Exploiting the chaos in Sichuan at the time, Cheng Rui continued his aggressive expansion, sending one of his most able commanders, Xu Cun, to invade eastern Sichuan, sweeping up nearly all the prefectures along the river up to Yuzhou.¹⁰⁸ The intrusion of Jingnan troops into eastern Sichuan drew a counterattack from Wang Jian, who had just conquered Chengdu and begun unification campaigns against East Chuan.

Jingnan’s expansion lost momentum in 896 due to the defection of the seasoned Xu Cun, whose extraordinary capability inevitably incurred

Cheng Rui's suspicion, prompting the general to surrender to Wang Jian. The first large-scale military conflict between the two powers broke out the following spring, when two Shu commanders seized Yuzhou and Luzhou, leading to the successful annexation of East Chuan.¹⁰⁹ Thereafter, Wang Jian did not launch further campaigns against Jingnan, perhaps because his attentions soon shifted to Shannan West and the consolidation of his power in the new territories.

Wang Jian's campaign to conquer the gorges was launched only in 903, after he had successfully concluded his conquest of Shannan West and established a good relationship with the Liang. Timing was perhaps the most essential element of this campaign. In the summer of 903, Cheng Rui led his entire elite force, reportedly one hundred thousand troops, downstream, to save an ally in the middle Yangzi from the army of Wu. This imprudent military adventure turned out to be a disaster. Two warlords in Hunan seized the opportunity to conquer Jiangling, where Cheng Rui had left few defending forces. The loss of their base drove the expeditionary troops of Jingnan into panic, and their warships were fired upon by their enemies, ultimately leading to the suicide of the vanquished Cheng Rui.¹¹⁰ Advised by an adopted son, Wang Jian immediately ordered his army to attack the Jingnan troops along the upper Yangzi. In only two months, the Shu army occupied four significant prefectures in the area (Kui, Wan 萬, Zhong 忠 and Shi 施).¹¹¹

At this time, the vanguards of the Shu had the capacity to advance into Guizhou and Xiazhou 峽州 (today's Yichang of Hubei province), in the middle and eastern sections of the gorges, the traditional orbit of Jingnan. Yet the occupation of the entire gorges was not planned. After a discussion among his advisors, Wang Jian gave up the idea and summoned his armies back to the strategic Kuizhou, in the western extension of the gorges, where troops were stationed for defense.¹¹² This military withdrawal was understandable. By the end of the year, Wang Jian's attention had returned to the north, where the powerful Liang lorded over the Tang court in Chang'an. The Shu had to prepare for the upcoming crisis. Also, for Shu policy-makers, consolidation of newly seized eastern Sichuan, rather than territorial expansion against an indefensible

region, held priority. The reason that Kuizhou was chosen as the site for military defense was obvious. Among the three gorges, the Qutang Gorge 瞿塘峽 to the south of Kuizhou had long been known in Chinese military history for its astonishing dangers, with steep mountains on its banks, extreme currents, and dense rocks in the middle of the river, all of which helped make it a perfect natural barrier for defending against threats from downstream.¹¹³

The period of interregnum in Jingnan lasted for nearly a year. Its seat, Jiangling, was first occupied by invaders from Hunan, then fell into the hands of Zhao Kuangning 趙匡凝, the governor of Shannan East, who made his younger brother Kuangming 匡明 governor of Jingnan.¹¹⁴ Both brothers were well known in the late Tang for their unbroken tribute to the Tang court, even after Zhu Wen transferred the emperor to Luoyang. At the beginning of Zhao Kuangming's rule in Jingnan, he inherited the aggressive policy of Cheng Rui, sending navies to attack Wang Jian's stronghold in Kuizhou in the summer of 904. This invasion was foiled by the Shu army in the western gorges, where they laid thick iron chains on the surface of the river along the gorges, binding the two ends of the barriers on the banks. This defensive device was called "locking the gorges" (*suo xia* 鎖峽), a method used on the river several times in history.¹¹⁵ Not surprisingly, the antagonistic relationship between Shu and Jingnan was soon replaced by a friendly one because both powers came to realize that the Liang was the most threatening enemy at this critical time. In the early summer of 905, Zhao Kuangning sent his envoy to Chengdu to set up an alliance against the Liang.¹¹⁶ His association with the Shu and other powers such as the Wu inevitably incurred the enmity of Zhu Wen, who could not countenance such an opponent so close to his power center. In the fall of 905, the Liang army invaded Shannan East and soon occupied Xiangzhou, compelling Zhao Kuangning to flee to Huainan. His brother suffered the same fate one month later, abandoned Jiangling, and fled to Chengdu where all of his troops, reported to number twenty thousand, were incorporated into the Shu forces.¹¹⁷

The victory of Zhu Wen in the year 905 expanded his influence, for the first time, into the Yangzi region, making military conflict with the

Shu unavoidable. In early 906 Wang Jian sent an army to attack Guizhou on the heels of his campaign against the Liang at Jinzhou.¹¹⁸ In order to strengthen his control in Jingnan, Zhu Wen dismissed the deputy governor, whom he believed to be cowardly, and appointed the veteran Gao Jichang 高季昌 (858–928), his adopted grandson. The new governor demonstrated his extraordinary competence over the next few years, foiling a series of invasions from the south and east, quickly resuscitating the local economy and rebuilding Jiangling on the ruins of several conflagrations. The outer city walls of Jiangling were enlarged and fortified in 912 for better defense, and by the following year Gao Jichang had built a huge navy, including five hundred warships. The rejuvenated Jingnan under the leadership of the able Gao Jichang soon achieved autonomy and successfully maintained it throughout the Five Dynasties.¹¹⁹

Collisions along the gorges between Wang Jian and the rising Gao Jichang proved unavoidable. As early as the spring of 908, a battle between the two sides occurred at Guizhou.¹²⁰ In spring 914, Gao Jichang launched a large-scale campaign against the Shu, aiming to recapture the prefectures along the upper Yangzi formerly controlled by Cheng Rui. Yet his fleet was stopped by the Shu army at Kuizhou, where warships could not break through the iron chains deployed on the stream. Gao Jichang ordered his men to set fire to the defense works of the Shu, but the strategy led to disaster for the invaders themselves, as the wind suddenly changed direction to the advantage of the Shu. At the end of the most significant battle, Gao lost five thousand men and barely escaped in a small boat after the stern of his own ship was damaged.¹²¹

The result of this war in 914 once again confirmed the unchallengeable hegemony of the Former Shu in the upper Yangzi. But Wang Jian did not take the opportunity to penetrate further into the core of Jingnan. Instead he maintained his earlier defensive stance against the small regime to his east. Several months later, Wang Jian transferred the prefectural seat of Zhenjiang Command 鎮江軍 (lit. Guarding the River) from Zhongzhou to Kuizhou, apparently as a means to strengthen the defense of the eastern border of the empire.¹²² That summer, when someone advised Wang Jian to destroy a dam in the upper gorges and inundate Jiangling,

a senior advisor dissuaded him: “Although Gao Jichang is disobedient, his people are innocent; Your Majesty should pacify the world with virtue and not allow the neighboring people to become fodder for fish and turtles” (高季昌不服，其民何罪，陛下以德懷天下，忍以鄰國之民為魚鰲食乎).¹²³ Admittedly, more reasons for the tolerant policy must have lain beyond this Confucianist rhetoric. The Shu had been dragged into war with the aggressive Qi in the north for the past three years and Wang Jian, understandably, did not want to get involved in a lasting war on another front. More importantly, Jingnan was still a nominally subordinate command of the Liang, with whom Shu had established a good relationship. A further intrusion into the strategic Jingnan might set off a chain reaction that would topple the precarious balance of power of the day. In a manner reminiscent of the conservative gesture of the Shu in the incident of Xiangzhou in 909, this self-restraint again reflected the Shu’s pragmatic attitude in dealing with neighboring powers, based on a cautious calculation of its own strength in the turbulent multistate system.¹²⁴ Not surprisingly, the border of Shu and Jingnan was maintained in the gorges between Kuizhou and Guizhou throughout Wang Jian’s reign, and the previous tensions between the two powers abated, as evidenced by the diplomatic marriage alliance between a governor of the Former Shu and a son of Gao Jichang years later.¹²⁵ The next attempt of Gao to invade the upper gorges would not come until a decade later, when the Shu suffered a fatal strike from the north.

DIVIDING THE DADU RIVER: THE SHU AND YUNNAN REGIMES

As its territory extended to the far south and west of Sichuan, Wang Jian’s Shu regime had no way to avoid the historical problem of troublesome relations with the non-Chinese regimes that had long harassed the Tang dynasty. Yet the new lord of Shu had luck on his side. When he came to power at the end of the Tang period, ever-powerful and hostile Tibet, to the northwest, had broken up into several small principalities, and none possessed the strength to menace Shu.¹²⁶ The major threat on the border came from the Nanzhao in the south. But this aggressive

neighbor in Yunnan also suffered a crippling blow due to internal strife, and a military strike by Shu troops in 914 handicapped its successor kingdom, which never again posed a threat to Shu. Indeed, as one historian observes, during the chaos of the late ninth and early tenth centuries, “China was more immune from Nanzhao attacks than before.”¹²⁷

Merely a decade before Wang Jian entered Shu, the threat of Nanzhao on the southern border of China was believed by the Tang government to be serious. The court required governors of West Chuan to consider border defenses and negotiations with their hostile neighbor as major responsibilities during their tenure. After Gao Pian was transferred to Chengdu in 875, the rampant invasions by Nanzhao during the previous decades finally were curbed. The armistice began in 877, when a new ruler of Nanzhao ascended the throne and sought to establish a marriage alliance with the beleaguered Tang empire. After a heated debate among Tang officials at court and in Chengdu, the emperor agreed to the marriage, in order to keep peace on the southern border at this critical time. Yet the subsequent negotiations and disputes over the propriety of the marriage alliance and other related diplomatic issues ended without any actual result when, after returning to Chang’an in the mid-880s, the Tang court broke its promise.¹²⁸

After that, no further significant contacts between the two regimes are on record until 897, when Nanzhao experienced a bloody transition as a powerful minister murdered the king and installed a puppet ruler. Nanzhao sent an envoy in the name of the new king to the southwestern border of West Chuan, expressing an intent to restore good relations with the Tang.¹²⁹ Yet it was Wang Jian, who had grabbed the West Chuan governorship in 891, not the Tang emperor, who would decide how to deal with border issues in southwest China.

The Tang court intended to respond to the mission from Nanzhao with a formal edict, following established diplomatic practice. However, Wang Jian dissuaded the emperor, insisting that “A petty barbarian nation like Nanzhao does not deserve our imperial decree and will certainly not dare invade our borders as long as I govern the Southwest” (南蠻小夷，不足辱詔書，臣在西南，彼必不敢犯塞).¹³⁰ Under such

circumstances, the court of Zhaozong, which was facing an extremely dangerous crisis in North China, could do nothing but “accede” to Wang Jian’s suggestion. Thus the new lord of Chengdu officially replaced the central government in dealing with Nanzhao, previously an “equal” state with the Tang, and soon took the opportunity to consolidate his newly seized domain and improve his authority in Shu.

To chasten Nanzhao, Wang Jian started to strengthen his control over the indigenous non-Chinese peoples dwelling in the vast border regions to the south and west of his domain. Since the mid-eighth century, these tribal men had swung between the three great powers of the Tang, Tibet and Nanzhao and played a considerable role in their military conflicts.¹³¹ Wang Jian’s first target was the tribes living to the north of the Dadu River, groups traditionally under the nominal administration of West Chuan. Because of the contiguity of their lands to the Tang power base in the Chengdu Plain, these tribes were viewed as the “Shallow Barbarians” (*qian mian* 淺蠻) by their Chinese neighbors. Their three hereditary chieftains, known as the “Three Kings” (*san wang* 三王), had been bribed by both the Tang governors in Chengdu and by Nanzhao, each side wishing to use them to spy on the military affairs of the other. Relying on this advantageous position, these chieftains became more and more refractory, and even built connections with some disobedient Chinese military commanders who, when at odds with their governors, would entice the “barbarians” to make trouble along the borders. For a long time, the situation had been tolerated by successive governors in Chengdu, cautious civilian bureaucrats who mainly maintained territorial stability through appeasement rather than confrontation. But Wang Jian would not tolerate this soft-peddling approach. Around the same time he obtained imperial authorization to manage border disputes independently, Wang Jian ordered the execution of a captured general who manipulated the tribes of the “Three Kings” for personal interest while acting as commander of tribal affairs on the border. The conventional yearly supply of silks as bribes to the three chieftains was also terminated. Both of these orders clearly showed the resolution of the new lord of Shu to defend his own southern borders with an iron hand. This

uncompromising stance proved very effective. Sources report that no invasions occurred for a long time, even without a single guard being deployed on the northern bank of the Dadu River.¹³²

It was not until 914 that a large-scale war erupted on the southern border between a pair of new rivals, Wang Jian's Shu empire and Dachanghe 大長和 (902–928), a newly established regime in Yunnan and the successor to the Nanzhao.¹³³ In the final days of the year, alarms rang in the south reporting the enemy's invasion. Three adopted sons of the Shu emperor, including the capable Xu Cun (Wang Zongbo), retaliated, leading their elite armies, rebuilt during the years of Wang Jian's military adventure in Shu. The war soon ended in a great victory for the Chinese troops, who triumphed in three significant battles. The last one turned out to be a disaster for the enemy, which lost more than twenty thousand men in total, half reported to have been killed in battle, the other half drowned in the Dadu River when a wooden bridge broke during their panicked flight. Shu forces crossed the river and chased the rest of the Dachanghe troops south of the river until Wang Jian summoned them back.¹³⁴ The three aforementioned tribal chieftains, who had escaped punishment for a long time, were executed at this time by Xu Cun under accusations of having leaked military information.¹³⁵ More than three thousand captives were sent back to Chengdu, where they were "accepted" by Wang Jian in a grand ritual held in the inaugural month of 915, as symbols of the Shu lord's great military achievement.¹³⁶

The great significance of the war of 914 was that it marked the first overwhelming victory achieved by Chinese troops in the previous half century, a period marked by a series of invasions and plunderings by the Nanzhao against wealthy Shu lands. More importantly, the great triumph finally dissolved lasting threats on the southern borders, which had menaced the former Tang dynasty since the middle eighth century. After suffering this deadly strike, the successors of the Nanzhao in Yunnan never dared to launch an invasion into Shu territory. Moreover, the defensive war against Dachanghe also reflected a consistent policy in dealing with interstate relations, which, as a practical survival strategy after 907, emphasized defense and border security, instead of aggressive

territorial expansion. Wang Jian never hesitated to resort to all possible means to awe hostile neighbors and keep his “empire” intact and immune from invasions, but he did not carelessly engage in wars, as shown by his withdrawal of troops from south of the Dadu River after severely punishing the enemy. As Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302), the commentator of *Zizhi tongjian*, once remarked, “Considering the depth and many natural barriers of the barbarian lands, [Wang Jian] did not want to attack farther to fatigue his army; expelling the invaders from his domain was the sole purpose of the lord of Shu” (蠻地深阻，不欲勞師遠攻，驅之出境而已，此蜀主之志也).¹³⁷

The “barbarian” regime in Yunnan, however, was not ignored by the Shu regime, whose attention was still focused on the north. For the next decade, peace reigned on the southern border. Some economic, cultural and diplomatic contacts between the two powers were reported, including “tributes” (*chaogong* 朝貢) from Yunnan offered to Wang Jian’s successor in 920 and 924.¹³⁸ The most important embassy from the south arrived in the early 920s, headed by Duan Yizong 段義宗, the minister of the Dachanghe state. By one account, Duan Yizong attempted to maintain an equal status in his mission to Shu. He shaved his head and took a Buddhist name, as a means to avoid prostration before the Shu emperor, a strategy the Chinese had used years before in dealing with the Nanzhao. But to his disappointment, the courtiers of Shu insisted that the Yunnan envoys kneel down at the imperial audience, and in the end, the foreign minister had no choice but to perform the etiquette for a tributary state.¹³⁹ This dispute between the two regimes on diplomatic protocol should be understood in the context of contemporary power relations. The Dachanghe state, perhaps still fearing the military prowess of Shu, chose to compromise rather than risk confrontation. The weakness of Dachanghe pushed the regime to build a marriage alliance in 924 with another Chinese regime, the Southern Han, which controlled today’s Guangdong and Guangxi.¹⁴⁰ The Former Shu apparently tried to imitate the old tributary relations between the Tang empire and the Nanzhao, which surely helped it win the necessary respect from other Chinese equals in the Central Plains.

With the fall of the Former Shu in 925, connections between the two sides seem to have been interrupted. When commanders of the Later Tang, after conquering Shu, attempted to reestablish contact with Yunnan by returning captives detained in Chengdu, they received no response and their envoys were stopped at the border.¹⁴¹ Wang Jian's practice of maintaining the Dadu River as a natural geographical borderline between Chinese territory and the "barbarian" regimes in Yunnan was later adopted by the founding emperor of the Song after his conquest of Shu in 965: after studying the map, he rejected any further invasion of the south, declaring that all lands south of the river were not his, and he had no ambitions to seize them.¹⁴² In fact, Yunnan was "not a major concern of the Chinese again until the thirteenth century, when Mongol armies invaded the region as part of their plans for the conquest of all Asia."¹⁴³

As for other non-Chinese peoples within and beyond the borders of Shu, a policy akin to that which dealt with the "Three Kings" tribes was adopted. On the one hand, Wang Jian would live in concord with the non-Chinese peoples on the borders to maintain stability. On the other, he would never hesitate to use military power to enforce his authority. Understandably, a harmonious coexistence with the peoples along the vast border was important for many reasons. As mentioned earlier, markets had been established along the southern and western borders to trade for horses with the locals tribes since 891.¹⁴⁴ Moreover, the submission of the "barbarians" was used as a symbol of the legitimate rule of the new regime. In the inaugural edict issued in 907 after the Shu empire was founded, Wang Jian called upon the non-Chinese tribes living around the Min and Qionglai Mountains, known to the Tang people as the "Eight States of the Western Mountains" (Xishan baguo 西山八國), who had long been under the dominance of the West Chuan governors on behalf of the Tang government, to show solidarity with the new Shu regime.¹⁴⁵ Wang Jian inherited the traditional Tang policy of applying "loose control" over the submissive tribes, bestowing both official titles and authorizations for self-rule on tribal leaders.¹⁴⁶ But when non-Chinese peoples challenged his rule, Wang Jian immediately resorted to

military solutions and showed no mercy. Two revolts launched by non-Chinese were recorded in the reign of Wang Jian, one led by the Qiang 羌 people at Weizhou 維州 (today's Lixian of Sichuan province) in 912, the other at Rongzhou, to the south, in 917. Both were suppressed ruthlessly by the Shu ruler.¹⁴⁷ Yet, as for those "barbarians" in the far southwest who had little influence on the borders, the Former Shu regime seemed to have no interest in contact.¹⁴⁸

Relations between the Former Shu and some other Chinese regimes of the time should also be mentioned here. Besides the Liang, Qi, and Jingnan, the Chu might have also shared borders with the Shu for a time. Centered in Hunan, the Chu once extended their influence to the northeast of today's Guizhou province, a region adjacent to Shu's Wutai Command 武泰軍. But understandably, no border conflict or diplomatic contact was recorded in this vast mountainous area, into which neither of the Chinese regimes had interests or factual influences to penetrate.¹⁴⁹ With those regimes that did not neighbor Shu during the period, there was no doubt that some diplomatic or trade contacts existed. The Wu, in the lower Yangzi, was a major power with which Wang Jian had allied to resist Zhu Wen at the end of the Tang period, and the Southern Han in far southern China sent an envoy to Chengdu to establish a formal interstate relationship two years after the death of Wang Jian.¹⁵⁰ Most importantly, another former ally of Wang Jian, the Jin, had quickly developed into a new hegemon in North China under the leadership of Li Cunxu, who eventually founded his own empire, known as the Later Tang. A few years after Wang Jian passed away, the new hegemon soon broke the old balance of power on which the Former Shu had relied to survive, and finally brought this once-prosperous empire to an end.

CHAPTER 5

LEGITIMIZING A REGIONAL EMPIRE, 907–918

此日樓臺鼎鼐，他時劍履山河。都人齊和大風歌，管領群臣來賀。

*As you take on supreme civil powers today,
Recovery of the heartland by force of arms awaits you.
Residents of the capital will greet you, a vast wind swirling like
a song,
As the multitude of officials extend felicitations in obeisance.*

—Liu Guo, “Xijiang yue”¹

When the memorial reached Wang Jian, on a late afternoon in the fall of 908, the inaugural year of the reign entitled Martial Perfection (Wucheng 武成), the emperor, weary yet excited, was returning to his palace by horse from the northern suburbs of Chengdu, where he had just reviewed

his imperial armies. The memorial had been submitted by the imperial Daoist master Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), who reported the transformation of two large, yellow clouds into an august purple as they hovered near the city walls—an event that coincided with the military parade. Such yellow clouds, Du explained, had appeared at the times of Yao 堯 and Shun 舜, two ancient sages and kings, while purple clouds had allegedly appeared under the reigns of two other great monarchs. Thus Du Guangting predicted that Wang Jian would “surpass” (*chao* 超) these historic examples, adding, “your virtue has caused Heaven to summon auspicious clouds, an event observed by Chinese as well as barbarians, their merriment extending from the mountains to the seas” (德動天休，瑞呈雲物，華夷共仰，海嶽同歡).²

Although the source does not mention the emperor’s response to this memorial, Wang Jian most likely appreciated it, not only for the political compliment but also for Du’s creative interpretation of auspicious phenomena, which fortuitously coincided with his urgent need for legitimacy. He had conquered Shu on horseback, but as an enlightened and wise statesman, he quickly realized that the land could not be governed by merely martial means. To be sure, maintaining a formidable army was necessary to both his domination of Shu and his diplomatic negotiations with neighboring powers, but the “perfection” of his rule—as promised by the reign title “Wucheng,” a term apparently adopted from the *Book of History*³—could hardly succeed through military means alone. Indeed, coercive power is, by its very nature, of limited use in securing domestic control because it intensifies alienation as it achieves order, and it must be supplemented with more constructive forms of compliance.

In many ways, justifying his imperial rule amidst the tumult that followed the Tang dynasty presented a greater challenge to Wang Jian than the conquest of Shu. A man of obscure birth who seized power through military feats, he could never escape the doubts that haunted other usurpers of his day, like Zhu Wen. By one account, on the eve of the founding of the Liang, one of Zhu Wen’s brothers derided the rising monarch with obvious contempt: “How ridiculous that you, third brother of Zhu house, should become Son of Heaven” (朱三爾可作天子乎)!⁴ Compared to

the Liang ruler, a “mere commoner from Dangshan” (*Dangshan yi min* 陽山一民) in his brother’s words,⁵ Wang Jian hailed from an even more humble background. Born to a family of bread vendors at Xuzhou, Wang Jian initially made a living as an illicit trader in salt. He was once arrested and put in jail, but had then changed his fortunes through the military: from a Zhongwu captain, he catapulted to the rank of general of the imperial army, and eventually military governor. Moreover, as a northerner and a longstanding “loyal” governor of Tang, he surely faced local impediments to his enthronement in Shu. Thus, beginning in 907, when he founded the Shu empire, legitimation of imperial authority became Wang Jian’s most pressing concern.

By employing a series of legitimizing strategies—recruiting civilian officials, developing the local economy, patronizing Buddhism and Daoism, and invoking assorted cultural symbols—Wang Jian strove to justify his position as successor to the Tang dynasty and transform himself from a *fin de siècle* warlord to an emperor in a new era. During this process, however, he did not aim at exclusive sovereignty over the whole of China, which was apparently not a realistic goal. Instead, his intent was to exercise a practical and “limited” sovereignty over his own domain, while “sharing” Heaven’s Mandate with other self-proclaimed monarchs of the time. Wang Jian’s legitimizing efforts, while not wholly embraced by his subjects, were seldom resisted by them either. Shu locals and literati migrating from the north voluntarily chose to collaborate with the “usurper,” whom they believed uniquely able to maintain local stability and peace while the Shu region was surrounded by chaos.

RECRUITING THE TALENTED

Like most military rulers in the Five Dynasties period, Wang Jian realized the importance of establishing a civilian government after founding his empire, and actively solicited literati to bolster his legitimacy and the efficiency of governance.⁶ Compared with his contemporary rivals, Wang Jian employed more scholars and treated literati with greater deference. When mentioning the characteristics of Wang Jian’s rule, most

Song historians tend to praise him. For example, Sima Guang writes with commendation:

目不知書，好與書生談論，粗曉其理，是時唐衣冠多避亂於蜀，蜀主禮而用之，使舉修故事，故其典章文物有唐遺風。

Though illiterate, Wang Jian was fond of talking with scholars and crudely appreciated their teachings. In his time many esteemed personages of Tang took refuge in Shu and received respect from the ruler, who asked them to revive the old institutions. This is why the regime could preserve the spirit of the former Tang dynasty.⁷

Even Ouyang Xiu, the famous historian known for his harsh treatment of southern pretenders of the period, grudgingly concedes in his *New History of the Five Dynasties*: “He may have arisen among rogues, but Jian was a cunning personality who treated his subordinates well. So, once he assumed royal titles, he drew upon the famous courtiers and distinguished families of Tang [to staff his own court]” (建雖起盜賊，而為人多智詐，善待士。故其僭號，所用皆唐名臣世族).⁸

The cooperation between Wang Jian and the literati started early: it can be traced back to 887, when he launched a military venture at Lizhou under the direction of Zhou Xiang, the first civilian advisor of his career. With the development of Wang Jian’s power, especially after his appointment as governor of West Chuan in 891, the routine paperwork and official communications of the central government required the recruitment of more civilian aides. The urgency of this need can be seen from a request Wang Jian submitted to the court for a qualified civil official to serve as his secretary.⁹ In this respect, he was not different from any other warlord, who, similarly lacking in literary training, had to rely on literati to draft letters, memorials and other documents.¹⁰

Among the civil posts of the provincial government of Wang Jian at this time, the Military Secretary (Zhangshuji 掌書記) was the most important. Before Wang Jian ascended the throne, at least three such secretaries served him successively, all enjoying his special trust and favor. The first appointee was Feng Juan, a literary genius whose

FIGURE 4. Statue of a Former Shu Civil Official.



writings were regarded as “masterpieces” (*dashoubi* 大手筆) of the day.¹¹ Having earned the “Advanced Scholar” (*jinshi* 進士) degree in the late Tang period, Feng was appointed as prefect of Meizhou 眉州 (today’s Meishan of Sichuan province) under Zhaozong’s reign, but was rejected by Chen Jingxuan, the governor who controlled his domain at that time by ignoring directives from the court. Feng remained obscure until the early 890s, when his fame attracted the victorious Wang Jian. Known to be acerbic and arrogant, Feng got along very badly with his patron initially, whom he disrespected and even mocked. As a result, Wang Jian removed Feng from the position of Military Secretary, but still did not punish him harshly. Their relationship recovered in 903, when Feng Juan once again showcased his extraordinary literary talents by composing a brilliant diplomatic missive as a reply to a Liang envoy. According to one account, the letter had been drafted many times by other secretaries, but none satisfied Wang Jian until he read Feng’s piece; thereafter, the two “resumed their rapport as before” (卻復前歡).¹²

Gao Zhu 高燭, a literatus who took office around 896, might have been the second secretary of Wang Jian. Sources do not provide much information about him, but he must have played an important role in Wang Jian’s decision-making. It was on his advice that the ruler spared the surrendered commander Xu Cun (Wang Zongbo).¹³ Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (846–910), an eminent poet, descendant of a prestigious family, and former Tang official holding a *jinshi* degree, also served as one of Wang Jian’s secretaries. His first visit to Shu was in 897, when the court appointed him a deputy envoy to mediate the conflict between Wang Jian and Gu Yanlang. Though his mission failed, his meeting with the rising Shu ruler might have influenced Wei Zhuang’s later decision to choose Shu as a sanctuary in the face of political chaos in the north. There he was appointed as the new Military Secretary, and came to contribute considerably to the founding of the Shu empire, becoming Wang Jian’s first chief minister.¹⁴

Admittedly, Wang Jian’s interest in the literati at this stage was mainly practical. The standard for his selection was simply good writing skill. Reportedly, before employing a local Shu scholar named Hou He 侯翮,

Wang Jian asked Feng Juan to test the man's literary skills, a measure reflecting not only his trust in Feng but also his care for the quality of civil aides. Hou He, fully aware of the governor's concern, submitted a boastful letter to the ruler shortly after his employment, vaunting that he could "compose memorials while walking and finish declarations while sitting" (行修箋表，坐了檄書).¹⁵

Understandably, Wang Jian's zealous search for men with superior literary skills was also, in part, a "face-saving" competition with other regional potentates, who had likewise hired prestigious scholars to draft letters. As explained in the words of a Qing historian, "Those military strongmen vied for superiority so eagerly that even in exchanging letters, they deemed it a shame to rank after others" (蓋群雄割據，各務爭勝，雖書檄往來，亦恥居人下).¹⁶ By one account, Wang Jian greatly appreciated the epistolary style of the Qi, as elegantly rendered by Li Maozhen's secretary, Wang Chao 王超. When Wang Jian found a talented man named Wang Baohui 王保晦 (d. 918), whom he believed could match Wang Chao in writing, the ruler proudly pronounced the "Two Wangs 二王" peers.¹⁷

As circumstances changed, Wang Jian's pursuit of literacy masters as retainers to meet a practical need had to be replaced by a more comprehensive employment policy. When Wang Jian proclaimed himself emperor in 907, his regime's urgent need for civil officials became blatantly clear. Changing titles was easy, but administering an empire in the Chinese tradition required much more: the design and execution of numerous imperial ceremonies and rituals; the drafting and promulgation of edicts; the establishment and staffing of departments; and of course, the enacting of economic, legal, and cultural policies for the new state. Obviously, neither his large pack of military commanders nor his small cohort of talented secretaries was sufficient for these tasks. The new government desperately demanded the participation of literati with different abilities and backgrounds.

Thus, the first priority of the new regime was to select more civil officials of various backgrounds and capabilities to properly administer the newly founded Shu state. First, both candidates waiting for review and

men who had “persuaded [Wang Jian] to ascend the throne” (*quanjin* 勸進) were employed directly in government; even those who had lost their previous documents of appointment (*gaochi* 告赤) were allowed to participate in the civil-selection process. Second, all dismissed or demoted former Tang officials, no matter how egregious their former offenses, were given a chance to be reappointed. To recruit more talent, the local administrators were encouraged to recommend eminent literati. Furthermore, selection was not confined to writing skills as before, but aimed to cover a more diverse range of abilities. As stated in the inaugural imperial edict of Wang Jian, “those worthy and righteous men who are able to remonstrate with forthright speech, those who are good at educating and transforming the people and assisting officials, and those who have mastered political statecraft or military strategies” (賢良方正，能直言極諫，達於教化，明於吏材，政術精詳，軍謀宏遠) and “those with extraordinary wisdom and outstanding literary talents, as well as recluses and men of fame in the local [area]” (或智辯過人，或詞華出格，或隱山林之跡，或聞鄉里之稱), all would be “employed according to their abilities” (量材敘用).¹⁸

Although the need for literati to staff his new court was pressing, Wang Jian still paid close attention to quality in these mass selections. Acknowledging the existence of “too many ‘fake talents’ since the military turmoil of the late Tang period, men who clung to the powerful without possessing real abilities” (自唐朝兵革之後，淪濫尤多，附勢力者未必有材), the emperor required the responsible departments to assess and select all the men they appointed with caution, including those recommended by provincial governors and prefects. Such a request reflects his attempt to balance the quantity and quality of bureaucrats. This employment policy seems to have been effective. Though no civil examination was held in Wang Jian’s reign, his large-scale employment of literati from different backgrounds guaranteed a sufficient supply of suitable candidates to fill positions in the burgeoning central government and provincial administration.¹⁹

Understandably, to the literati in the north during this time, Shu provided a safe destination for survival, a precious sanctuary amidst a China beset with unceasing war. After Wang Jian seized power in Chengdu,

especially after 902, as the entirety of Shu attained a coveted peace under his unification, more and more northern literati “turned to Jian to escape the turmoil during the late years of the Tang” (當唐之末士人多欲依建以避亂).²⁰ As shown on the list of civil officials (appendix 4), a large number of the literati employed by Wang Jian were former Tang officials from the north who had sought refuge in Shu during the chaotic late Tang period. Doubtlessly, these seasoned officials, who had served the previous dynasty, some with jinshi degrees, offered tremendous help in constructing imperial institutions and operating Wang Jian’s regime. For example, Wei Zhuang drafted nearly all the laws, rituals, music, and imperial edicts during the founding of the Shu empire.²¹ Some professional Tang officials were also assimilated at the new court. Hu Xiulin 胡秀林, hailing from a hereditary family of astronomers in the Tang period, served at the same post in Wang Jian’s court, helping to design two calendars for his new patron.²²

If the initial steps of Wang Jian to attract and recruit literati were born mainly of political pragmatism, his further efforts in that direction should be seen as a conscious imitation of sage monarchs in history, a symbolic demonstration of his similarly “sagacious rule.” In Chinese historical writing, “sagacious rulers” (*shengzhu* 聖主 or *mingjun* 明君) were always dedicated to employing worthy men and promoting Culture (*wen* 文). Though a monarch of military origin, Wang Jian, too, exhibited an ambition to follow the path of exemplary past rulers. That was exactly how his civilian advisors endeavored to guide him. Xu Ji 許寂 (d. 936) advised the new throne to “search for the worthy” (*qiu xian* 求賢) because “previous rulers who exploited the moment and founded enterprises invariably succeeded by searching widely for great talent” (歷代之君，乘時啟運，莫不博訪髦士，詳求碩畫). After citing the examples of five ancient sage kings in his memorial, Xu Ji affirmed that this policy was “the basic principle of the past dynasties” (歷代之大經).²³ Similarly, Wang Kai 王鉞, another influential minister, elucidated the importance of culture in a more detailed memorial. Besides referring to eight ancient sage kings, Wang Kai examined the “sagacious rulers” of past dynasties since the Han, including several founding emperors.

All allegedly paid great attention to recruiting erudite literati, collecting books and encouraging the development of culture.²⁴

Under the influence of his civilian officials, Wang Jian made further efforts to attract literati and promote culture. In 908, aiming to “educate and transform” (*jiaohua* 教化) the people, he ordered the building of an imperial college (Guozijian 國子監) on the grounds of the former provincial school in Chengdu. Moreover, prefectural administrators were all required to renovate old Confucian temples so that students could hold seasonal ceremonies for the master.²⁵ Several years later, following the historical precedents (*gushi* 故事) of the great emperor Xuanzong of the Tang, a new building titled the Hall of Cultured Deliberation (Wensi Dian 文思殿) was built, where four collections of books, including classics, history, philosophy and literature, were stored, and many famed Confucians were selected to preside over it.²⁶ Following Tang institutional precedent, Wang Jian also established a significant office called the Shumishi 樞密使 (Military Commissioner), which was in charge of a variety of state affairs. Unlike the Tang, under whom the office was occupied by eunuchs, the Shu usually appointed members of the literati to this position throughout most of Wang Jian’s reign.²⁷ Several famed literati assumed positions of Hanlin academicians (Hanlin xueshi 翰林學士) and enjoyed high status at the court.²⁸

As seen, in his domination over Shu from 891 to 918, especially after his founding of the Shu empire, the illiterate Wang Jian both consciously and consistently cast himself as a guardian of the literati and their cultural traditions. As a result, the Former Shu attracted a large number of literati, and Wang Jian, gradually though not completely, transformed his military dominion into a civil “empire,” his identity successfully shifting from that of military warlord to imperial sovereign.²⁹

A SUCCESSOR TO THE TANG

In Chinese history, newly established dynasties often justified their conquests by blackening the images of former regimes, depicting the rule of the preceding dynasties as corrupt, barbarous, and tyrannical. Yet this

was not the case with Wang Jian, who instead believed that his legitimacy derived from the Tang, and attempted to emphasize his historical links to the former court. According to the *New History of the Five Dynasties*, Wang Jian once reminisced before courtiers about his days of service to Xizong, the former Tang general, depicting with admiration a scene he had seen from the Chang'an palace:

吾為神策軍將時。。。。。。見天子夜召學士，出入無間，恩禮親厚如寮友，非將相比也。

As commander of the Shence Army...I once garrisoned my men in the Tang imperial palace and observed the Son of Heaven summoning academicians in the middle of the night, as they came and went without stop. They treated each other with the kindness and courtesy of civil service colleagues [not ruler and subject], in contrast with the Emperor's [tense] relations with martial ministers.³⁰

The experience greatly influenced Wang Jian, who treated his literati advisors with similar deference. For the illiterate Shu ruler, who rose from a humble background and possessed neither direct experience nor historical knowledge of proper imperial conduct, the Tang monarch and his court provided a model of imperial authority. Through emulating the Tang court and its model of sovereignty—on the surface an act of homage—Wang Jian intended to draw support from the vast group of exiled Tang officials in Shu and, more importantly, to make manifest his newly established regime as the legitimate successor to the Tang.

Although the effective rule of the Tang court since the late ninth century had shrunk greatly with the growth of regional powers, its residual influence on a large population across China should not be underestimated. For those regional potentates who came to power through warfare in the late Tang period, an official title or office bestowed by the Tang emperor was still an indispensable qualification for their authority. For example, when a general proclaimed himself the deputy-governor of a command in northern Hebei, he insisted on requesting official banners and regalia which, in his words, should bear “the original color from [the court] at *Chang'an bense*” (長安本色).³¹ The eagerness of the warlords

to use the Tang cause as a rallying point for their own purposes did not diminish after 907. In the north, the founding emperor of the Later Tang, Li Cunxu, declared his empire to be a restoration of the Tang dynasty and tried hard to carry on the imperial legacy of the former regime.³² The same claim was made in south China a few years later, when Li Bian, a self-proclaimed descendant of the imperial Li house of Tang, established the Southern Tang empire.³³ Clearly, both rulers believed that affiliation with the preceding dynasty offered vital political currency that might provide a heightened aura of legitimacy.

Wang Jian had surely noticed the political utility of continuity. Even before his founding of the Shu empire, he proved a tactful strategist who skillfully aligned his actions and aims with the Tang cause. From 887 to 907, he consistently cast himself in the image of a loyal subject of the Tang, both in his conquest of Shu and in his military and diplomatic interactions with surrounding powers. Even after he proclaimed himself emperor, he maintained this strategy. To frame himself as a legitimate successor, he actively styled his regime as a continuation of Tang rule.

In his first imperial decree, Wang Jian articulated his legitimate succession to the Tang dynasty for first time:

賢良塗炭，朝市丘墟。生人既失其所天，大事須歸於有土
遂至蠻夷瀝款，士庶傾心，謂蜀都同章武之時，兼漢嗣絕山
陽之號。共陳天命，屬在朕躬。

[Since the Tang perished], the worthies have suffered great misery and the imperial capital has lain in ruins. Though the people had lost their supreme authority, the great enterprise still needed to be founded. Then the barbarians sent tribute [to me], and the elites and commoners alike paid homage, both believing Shu to be the capital, as it was at the end of the Han, deserving to inherit the imperial line and the title. [Thus] they together petitioned me to assume the Mandate of Heaven.³⁴

In this passage, Wang Jian styled himself as a just successor to the once-great Tang and a worthy heir who had won the unanimous support of barbarians and Chinese alike.

The traditional theory of “Five Virtues” (*wude* 五德) was adopted by Wang Jian to explain the succession of his regime to the Tang. Since the Qin–Han period, each dynasty had embraced one of the Five Elements (Metal, Wood, Water, Fire, and Earth) as a symbol of its relationship to the preceding regime. There were two patterns of applications of this theory in the transmission of Chinese dynasties: when one dynasty succeeded the other, it would either choose a virtue symbolizing “dominance over” (*ke* 克) the former regime, or an element symbolizing “generation” (*sheng* 生) by it. These two obviously opposite applications in fact reflected the attitude of the latter regime toward its predecessor.³⁵ By one account, Wang Jian once decorated his palace chair with gold and said proudly to his courtiers, “I succeeded the Tang and deserve to occupy this throne by the Virtue of Metal” (朕承唐，以金德王踞此床).³⁶ It is clear that Wang Jian had deliberately adopted Metal as the virtue for his new regime, implying that Shu had been “generated” by the Tang dynasty, which had been associated with the virtue of earth.³⁷ Thus the relationship of the two was not a conflicting one—the latter conquering or subduing the former, but a continuative one, namely, the Shu emanating from the Tang.

“Continuity” between Tang and Shu was constructed in other ways. Unlike most usurpers in Chinese history, who saw their careers under former regimes as an irritant, Wang Jian never hesitated to acknowledge his earlier official career as a Tang subject. Instead, he believed this connection offered a sense of continuity between the Tang and the Shu and gave political validation to his “legitimate” succession to the Tang. As Wang Jian stated openly in his initial imperial decree, “I, originally a Tang subject and a personal guard of [the Tang throne], have enjoyed great honors as governor, ranking alongside the aristocrats” (朕傾事唐臣，嘗居親衛，受藩鎮封崇之貴，著冊書鐘鼎之勳).³⁸

Wang Jian’s manner of dealing with other Tang officials similarly reflected his desire to confirm and manifest his ties with the Tang. In 908, he ordered that posthumous titles be bestowed on Tang courtiers who had died during the chaotic late Tang period. Former Tang officials, including many descendants of prestigious aristocratic families, were

widely recruited and given numerous honors at the new court. Among them, Zhang Ge 張格 (d. 927) was perhaps the most renowned. A son of the former Tang minister Zhang Jun 張濬 (d. 903), he fled to Chengdu in 903, when his father was murdered by Zhu Wen. Due to this background, Wang Jian treated him with “a special measure of kindness and courtesy” (*enli you yi* 恩禮尤異). He was first appointed as Hanlin academician and soon promoted to chief minister, in 908, a position he held for the duration of Wang Jian’s reign.³⁹ Obviously, the capability of such scions of elite families was not what appealed to Wang Jian. One source records several anecdotes that poignantly satirize the abject incompetence of some such descendants of aristocratic origins. For examples, Wei Xu 韋巽, the son of Wei Zhaodu, was mocked by colleagues as “a dead dog” (*sigou* 死狗); another man, who also hailed from a ministerial family, was given a sobriquet “donkey” (*lūzi* 驢子) for his indelicacy. Thus, for Wang Jian these men served as “window dressing,” their background providing a certain traditional prestige that added luster to the enhanced legitimacy of his new regime.⁴⁰

This special favor of Wang Jian even extended to Tang eunuchs, a notorious group, often accused of ruining the dynasty by literati of the day. Yan Zunmei 嚴遵美, a powerful eunuch under Xizong and Zhaozong, serves as a good example. Having been Military Supervisor of Shannan West, Yan surrendered to Wang Jian in 902 as Xingyuan fell. Under the protection of his new patron who “treated him with exquisite favor” (*youdai shenhou* 優待甚厚), Yan escaped the death sentence issued by the court to regional governors in the following year, part of a mass liquidation of eunuchs. After the Former Shu was founded, Yan was appointed Chief Eunuch of the Inner Court (Neishijian 內侍監), and helped the new court establish customs consistent with Tang precedent. When the eunuch passed away in his eighties, he was buried honorably with a posthumous title conferred by the emperor.⁴¹

As a self-anointed successor to the former dynasty, Wang Jian fully realized the symbolic meaning of the Tang emperors to the legitimacy of his new regime, one ostensibly “born” of the Tang. Unlike some other early tenth-century potentates, such as Li Cunxu, Wang Jian lacked the

most efficacious connection—an imperially bestowed surname to justify a natural inheritance. But this did not constrain his eagerness to express his reverence for the Tang. Seemingly to pay homage to the Tang, Wang Jian proscribed direct reference to the Tang ruling house. On a temple stele erected during the Former Shu, the characters referring to Tang emperors were all deliberately written in partial or incomplete form. Obviously, by applying such unique taboos on the written character, the Shu government intended to deliver a clear signal to the public that the current authority revered the past Tang rulers as its own ancestors.⁴²

The political images of the Tang emperors constituted another important mechanism by which Former Shu rulers publicly expressed respect for the dynasty. In Tang times, the state commissioned many statues of monarchs across China, especially in Buddhist and Daoist temples, an effort to exalt imperial authority and legitimize imperial rule.⁴³ Locally, these statues and images symbolized Tang authority. Not surprisingly, ambitious commanders utilized these symbols to increase their own prestige and legitimacy. For example, in the mid-eighth century, a general of Xichuan attacked Chengdu on the pretext that the governor there had destroyed the statue of Xuanzong.⁴⁴ In the waning days of the Tang, regional warlords like Yang Xingmi used images of Tang emperors to legitimize their unauthorized appointments or to sanction their military actions against Zhu Wen.⁴⁵ Wang Jian and his heir once hosted a large group of former Tang palace painters in Chengdu, and in the process bolstered the legitimacy of their Shu state by associating themselves with the images of Tang emperors.⁴⁶ After occupying Chengdu, Wang Jian frequently visited a local temple containing a portrait of Xizong.⁴⁷ In the late ninth century, when the title “Prince of Xiping” was bestowed on him by Zhaozong, Wang Jian commissioned a huge painting to depict the grandeur of his princely banners and other items given by the court.⁴⁸ Years later, the heir of Wang Jian also promoted this association of the Shu authority with the images of Tang monarchs. He once commissioned statues of all the Tang emperors for a memorial hall. Accompanying the Tang emperors was a statue of Wang Zijin 王子晉, a legendary Daoist immortal and alleged ancestor of the Wang house. Statues of the two Shu

emperors were placed in their midst.⁴⁹ In these ways, Shu rulers conveyed an association of their power with the preceding Tang visually.

PATRONIZING RELIGIONS

For most rulers in Chinese history, religion was an important instrument of rule and a tool of legitimation.⁵⁰ Like any other regime, the newly established Former Shu sponsored various ideologies, which, according to the theory of Antonio Gramsci, helped enable the ruling class to reduce its reliance on coercive power and to buttress their political dominion with moral and cultural authority.⁵¹ Ruling Shu, a region known for its deeply rooted religious and supernatural traditions, Wang Jian fully realized the importance of religion to the legitimation and consolidation of his power.

An indigenous religious tradition of China, Daoism had gained great popularity in the Shu area since the Han dynasty. As early as the fourth century, a regional regime in Shu had adopted Daoism to consolidate its rule. The religion flourished during the Tang period, as the Tang rulers declared Laozi, the supreme Daoist deity, their ancestor, and invoked Daoist liturgy extensively to help legitimize their power.⁵² Daoism's popularity in Shu continued during the late Tang due to the presence of Xizong's court-in-exile at Chengdu.⁵³ Given this history, Wang Jian's support of Daoism was inevitable. It served as a legitimizing vehicle for his power and a mediator between the local cults and new leadership from outside of Shu. Moreover, Wang Jian used Daoism to demonstrate continuity between the preceding royal house and himself as a self-declared successor to the Tang. This can be inferred from Wang Jian's enhancements of the Zhangren Temple 丈人觀 at Mount Qingcheng 青城山 (forty-five miles northwest of Chengdu), the sanctuary of a deity that Xizong endowed in 881, two decades before Wang Jian's accession.⁵⁴

Throughout his reign, Wang Jian showed a great generosity toward Daoism and its representatives at the Shu court. His benefactions included the construction of Daoist temples, the conversion of royal mansions into temples, and the bestowal of escalating honorary titles

for prestigious Daoist masters. For example, in 912, upon receiving report of an auspicious text found at Mount Xianju 仙居山 (thirty miles north of Chengdu), Wang Jian ordered the construction of a new temple, which was “built of huge stones with multiple functions” (材石宏偉, 功用甚多).⁵⁵ The relationship of the Shu ruler to Daoism was mutually beneficial: the religion legitimized the emperor and he was generous to it in turn. Such reciprocity was reflected in his cooperation with the Daoist master Du Guangting.

Du Guangting was the most celebrated Daoist figure during the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods. He studied Confucianism in his early youth and took civil service exams before becoming a Daoist disciple. Diligent and eager to learn, Du was versed in both Confucian and Daoist classics. He also studied Daoist teachings, scriptures, history, and magic arts, and wrote many books during his lifetime.⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, this Daoist genius soon obtained numerous honors from the Daoism-friendly court. During Xizong’s refuge in Shu, Du helped the exiled court maintain liturgical practices that associated the emperor with sacred local sites and confirmed the Tang’s continuing mandate to rule.⁵⁷ Subsequently, Du accompanied the emperor back to Chang’an, but soon returned to the south. His peregrinations closely paralleled those of Wang Jian, and the two men likely came to know one another during their travels. Eventually, Du Guangting emigrated farther south, to inner Shu, where he lived for the rest of his life and became an imperial priest of Wang Jian.

No source gives an exact date for Du Guangting’s initial involvement in Wang Jian’s government, but he enjoyed the ruler’s respect well before 907, and played an influential role at the Shu court thereafter.⁵⁸ Understandably, both his reputation as an erudite scholar and his affiliation with the Tang immediately appealed to the new ruler. Wang Jian’s trust in the Daoist is reflected in reports that the ruler “frequently discussed state affairs with Du” (頗與議政事).⁵⁹

Doubtless, Du Guangting’s primary contribution to his new patron involved religious services that, like those he performed for Xizong, linked the new emperor to a divine mandate. These Daoist rituals constituted a significant part of Wang Jian’s legitimation. In the case of the

Mount Xianju apocrypha of 912, Wang Jian was said to have enshrined a local saint named Zhang Hongdao 章弘道 as His Holiness Jiansheng 鑒聖真人 in response to the auspicious prophecy. Such an act, which ostensibly “implied...a divine investiture of the king,” was further legitimated by means of a series of Daoist rituals under the instruction of Du Guangting.⁶⁰

A study by Franciscus Verellen cites another Daoist ritual performed by Du Guangting for the Shu ruler and his courtiers. Known as rituals for personal destiny (*benming* 本命), these practices, sponsored by the members of the political elite on their birthdays, were supplications for good fortune, peace, and prosperity for the state and their families. “By obtaining divine protection for community leaders,” Verellen posits, “Personal Destiny rituals in fact conferred a form of investiture.” Wang Jian performed this grand ritual as part of his accession in 907, a year whose sexagesimal combination (*dingmao* 丁卯) coincided with the ruler’s birth year (847).⁶¹ In performing rituals and composing liturgical prayers, Du Guangting identified himself with the court and acted as a state priest whose religious services were closely bound with the political, military and administrative affairs of the Shu.

Du Guangting was also renowned for compiling, interpreting and disseminating portents, prophecies and marvels—a talent Wang Jian utilized to help demonstrate his mandate to rule. His collection of wonders, *Record of Marvels* (*Luyi ji* 錄異記), preserves many reports of auspicious portents, which, in his words, “occurred due to the arrival of destiny” (*shu zhi er chu* 數至而出).⁶² Du’s role was to record and reveal the meaning of the signs bearing Heaven’s will. When a portent was reported by local officials, he presented a well-written congratulatory memorial, which not only traced the historical precedent of the same portent but also predicted the upcoming prosperity of Shu. In one such memorial, Du commented on a divine sword “discovered” at Hezhou 合州 (today’s Hechuan of Sichuan province): “The First Emperor of Qin once got a sword in the center of a river and eventually swallowed the entire realm; Your Majesty finds a sword in a river, meaning that you will also unify the world” (昔嬴帝得之于水心，果吞六合，今陛下獲之于江上，即統萬方).⁶³

In another case, a county magistrate reported, in 910, that a huge dam had miraculously formed overnight amidst a torrential storm, thereby sparing Chengdu from floods. In a memorial congratulating the throne on the “intervention” of deities, Du vividly describes the marvel, an account preserved in his *Luyi ji*.⁶⁴ Wang Jian surely appreciated Du Guangting’s gift in interpreting signs in a manner that reinforced his political authority. In 916, the emperor consulted the master about the meaning of a folk ballad that his expeditionary army retrieved from the battlefield in the north. Skillfully, Du linked the ballad to the ongoing war between Shu and Qi that year, claiming the Shu ruler would soon “pacify the Three Qin regions and rule the world” (蕩定三秦，統臨萬國).⁶⁵

Du Guangting was highly effective at fabricating supernatural incidents to help legitimize the royal ascendancy of Shu rulers. Under his influence, the legendary Daoist immortal Wang Zijin was enshrined as an ancestor of the royal house of Shu.⁶⁶ One of his famous collections of Daoist immortals, *Wangshi Shenxian zhuan* 王氏神仙傳 is known to have contained accounts of fifty-five Daoist deities and immortals with the surname of Wang, a text obviously written to “adulate Wang Jian” (*yi chan* 以諂王建).⁶⁷ In a prophecy cited in his *Luyi ji*, he pictured Shu as a “sacred land” endowed with numinous qualities—precursors of a mandate from Heaven:

蜀之山川，為大福之地，久合為帝王之都。。。。。。又蜀字若去蟲，著金正應，金德久遠，王于西方，四海可服。

The mountains and rivers of Shu constitute a land of great blessings. It has long been suited to serve emperors and princes as [a] capital...If you removed the “insect” part from the character “Shu” and wrote “metal” [in its place], that would correspond appropriately to “metal virtue.” [The Wang house] will rule in perpetuity as kings over this western region, and all the world shall bow to it.⁶⁸

Clearly, both the interpretation of Shu’s “sacred geography” and the dynasty’s symbolic identification with metal are intended to establish Wang Jian as a destined and legitimate successor to the Tang.

Du Guangting played other roles at the Shu court, as seen in the large numbers of memorials preserved today. In addition to his Daoist role, Du served as a senior advisor, directly participating in political and military decision making. In 911, when the emperor insisted on personally leading troops to defend the northern border, Du submitted two memorials in succession, trying to dissuade Wang Jian from endangering himself.⁶⁹ In 916, when Shu troops seized Longzhou from Qi, Du's congratulatory memorial celebrated the victory and praised the emperor's military merit. In the same year, he wrote a memorial that celebrated the completion of a grand palace. And in 917, the priest submitted another to support Wang Jian's decision to execute a captured general.⁷⁰

Du Guangting also developed a justification for Shu's massive military build-up and Wang Jian's militancy, a stance obviously in contravention of Confucian ideals. In a supplication composed for a Daoist ritual sponsored by a magistrate, Du claims, "Within, [Wang Jian] subdues insurrection; without, he calms his borders. Still, he is unable to relinquish arms. When it comes to displaying the power of the Son of Heaven, and to wielding the general's battle-ax, all depends on expediency and only opportunity matters" (外靜邊方，下戢奸暴，蓋不得已未能去兵，至乃宣天子之威，用將軍之鉞，無非仗順，必在為時).⁷¹ Elsewhere appears another, similar argument, intended to legitimize Wang Jian's military deployments during an age of tumult. In the memorial celebrating the appearance of yellow clouds, Guangting extols the Shu ruler for his benevolence, calling him a "sage king" who developed armies only because "the Central Plains are still not at peace" (*Zhongyuan wei tai* 中原未泰) and merely "used the military to save the people from exploitation" (用拯生靈之弊).⁷²

In return for his support, Wang Jian generously rewarded the master. Du Guangting received the special honor of "independently meeting and advising the throne" (*du yin dui* 獨引對), without standing among other Daoist and Buddhist supplicants.⁷³ In 913, Du became a grand counselor with golden seal and purple ribbon (*Jinzi guanglu dafu* 金紫光祿大夫), imperial remonstrator of the left (*Zuo jianyi dafu* 左諫議大夫), and duke of Cai (*Cai guogong* 蔡國公) with the sobriquet gentleman of great

accomplishment (Guangcheng xiansheng 廣成先生). Three years later, he was appointed deputy minister of the board of finance (Hubu shang-shu 戶部尚書), clearly demonstrating that he performed both as Daoist master and as civilian official.⁷⁴ This unique status continued under the reign of Wang Jian's son. After receiving a Daoist register in the palace, the young emperor bestowed the title celestial master for transmitting perfection (Chuanzhen tianshi 傳真天師) upon Du, an act that represented the summit of his career at the Shu court.⁷⁵

Buddhism was also a major social force in medieval China, and it constituted another powerful tool by which Wang Jian attempted to legitimate his rule. Like Daoism, Buddhism enjoyed great popularity during the Tang period, which is widely considered a golden age of Chinese Buddhism. After a brief setback in the mid-ninth century, Buddhism quickly rose to exert great influence on state and society in the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods.⁷⁶ Its popularity in the Shu area was remarkable. "The people of Shu are addicted to Buddhism" (岷峨之人酷好釋氏), a source written in the tenth century confirms.⁷⁷ When a famous monk presented a lecture at Chengdu in 822, over ten thousand Chengdu citizens are said to have flooded the monastery. Many Shu governors in the late Tang period, such as Cui Anqian, were fond of Buddhism. When Xizong took refuge in Shu, the emperor extended his patronage to Buddhists, bestowing a purple cassock, a symbol representing extraordinary imperial favor, upon a local Buddhist master.⁷⁸ Buddhism remained a state-endorsed religion after Wang Jian came to power. Some of his soldiers even had Buddhist sutras in one hand and arms in the other, according to a record describing the mania of Buddhism among the Shu people at the time.⁷⁹ The popularity of Buddhism in Shu during the Five Dynasties is also evidenced by the plethora of statues carved on hills throughout the region, many of which still survive.⁸⁰

Wang Jian publicly patronized eminent Buddhist monks. Learning that Master Chuhong had arrived from the north, the Shu ruler established an exquisite monastery to accommodate his former mentor, who had encouraged him to join the army years ago.⁸¹ In 895, Wang Jian invited another famous monk, Zhiguang 智廣, to preside over one of

the largest temples in Chengdu.⁸² It is notable that a variety of Buddhist sects all enjoyed similar favor. In early 901, the fame of a local Tantric practitioner caught the attention of Wang Jian. The emperor summoned the man to Chengdu, building a grand altar for him to incant for three consecutive days.⁸³ Wang Jian's interest in Buddhism is more clearly observed in his response to a special offering made by a monk. In early 908, a monk gouged out one of his eyes and dedicated the sacrifice to Wang Jian—an extreme yet relatively popular act among Buddhists of the day to express their deep devotion to the faith. The newly enthroned emperor construed the sacrifice as a divine blessing and promised to host a vegetarian feast for ten thousand monks. Although, in the end, Confucian officials dissuaded him from making this magnificent gesture, the pledge clearly reflects the emperor's zeal for Buddhism.⁸⁴

Like his attitude toward Daoism, Wang Jian's interest in Buddhism not only exhibited his respect for the religion but also reflected his effort to legitimate his own rule. A group of eminent monks assumed posts at court, playing a role similar to that of Daoist priests. They contributed to the royal house and its rule by performing religious rituals and incantations. Three were granted the title "state masters" (*guoshi* 國師).⁸⁵ Wang Jian frequently visited Buddhist temples, listened to the lectures of masters, and celebrated Buddhist festivals. Given the popularity of Buddhism in Shu, no ruler could afford to remain indifferent. Sources report that when an itinerant Indian monk reached Shu after a long journey, Wang Jian personally greeted the foreigner, along with hundreds of thousands of devout Chengdu citizens. He must have seen the arrival of the monk from a distant "holy land" as a sign of broad recognition of his sovereignty. The arrival of the foreign master, in Du Guangting's interpretation, was evidence that "the imperial compassion spread even to foreign lands" (天慈遐被異域), indicating that "both the Chinese and barbarians are civilized [in Shu] where all the people enjoy happiness" (華夷率化, 億兆同歡).⁸⁶

If Du Guangting serves as an example of Wang Jian's cooperation with the Daoists, Guanxiu 貫休 (832–912) represents the Buddhist establishment's support for the Shu ruler. A native of modern Zhejiang,

Guanxiu was famed for poetry, which helped win him patronage among a number of regional potentates in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods.⁸⁷ By one account, Guanxiu once submitted a poem to his first political patron, Qian Liu, the military potentate of Wu Yue, complimenting the governor for “pacifying fourteen prefectures with one single sword” (一劍霜寒十四州). When Qian requested the monk to change “fourteen” to “forty,” suggesting an ambition to expand his territory, the monk refused, insisting that he could not misrepresent reality. Though historians are not likely credit the anecdote, it vividly portrays Guanxiu as a stubborn, talented monk seeking patronage from the powerful, but unwilling to play the sycophant and compromise his dignity.⁸⁸ Not surprisingly, the monk had difficulty getting along well with his second patron, Cheng Rui, governor of Jingnan. It is said that one day, when the presumptuous Cheng asked Guanxiu to teach him calligraphy, the monk declined, holding that such an instruction deserved to be convened in a more formal manner.⁸⁹ Eventually Guanxiu, then in his seventies, moved to Shu in search of a better patron, inspired perhaps by Wang Jian’s reputation for favoring Buddhists and literati. It soon turned out to be a wise decision.

In the fall of 902, Guanxiu reached Chengdu and submitted his first poem to the Shu ruler, whose unification of the Three Chuan was nearly complete:

河北江東處處災，唯聞全蜀勿塵埃。
一瓶一鉢垂垂老，千水千山得得來。

Disasters strike north of Yellow River and southeast of the Yangzi,
But I heard that the dust of war has alone eluded Shu;
Though terribly aged, I carry the canteen and alms bowl,
Contentedly arriving at Shu after crossing countless rivers and mountains.⁹⁰

The contrast between a tranquil Shu and the tumult elsewhere was no exaggeration. Thus, the eminent Buddhist master poetically cast the peaceful Shu under Wang Jian as a desirable and well-regulated

destination. Upon reading the poem, Wang Jian was “overjoyed” and treated Guanxiu with beneficence, calling him “the contented monk” (Dede heshang 得得和尚)—a term borrowed from Guanxiu’s poem. To show his respect, Wang Jian even knelt before the master’s table while addressing him. For a decade, until Guanxiu’s death in 912, the monk “consistently enjoyed the great favor of the Son of Heaven” (十年以來向承天眷), as one of his disciples observes, and in return made a special contribution to the legitimation of Wang Jian’s power.⁹¹

While Du Guangting promoted the legitimacy of Shu mainly through religious services, Guanxiu’s primary vehicle was his elegant poetic verse. “As a Buddhist, I have nothing but poems with which to repay the imperial favor” (釋子沾恩無以報，只擎章句貢平津), as he himself admitted.⁹² A prolific number of Guanxiu’s poems are preserved today in the *Collection of Zen Moon* (*Chanyue ji* 禪月集), an anthology compiled by a disciple in 923. The work contains many pieces written after Guanxiu entered Shu, some revealing his close relationship with the Shu ruler, some glorifying the merits of Wang Jian and justifying the ruler’s legitimacy.

The achievements of the Shu ruler constitute the main theme of Guanxiu’s poems. As in the aforementioned poem marking his arrival in Shu, Guanxiu used his poetry to evoke, with deft aesthetic sensibility, the peace and prosperity in Shu. In his description, “the land of Shu is peaceful and unified” (地寧得一); “the people from all classes are newly resuscitated and a wide domain enjoys stupendous wealth” (四人蘇活，萬里豐謐). In another poem, Guanxiu writes, “there is no war along your peaceful borders, crops mature in sweet-smelling paddies” (境靜消鋒鏑，田香熟稻黍). Guanxiu brought a particularly Buddhist understanding of Wang Jian’s pacification of the Shu in a chaotic age, observing that “the ruler’s compassionate heart resembles the Buddha” (始見君心是佛心).⁹³

Guanxiu depicted Wang Jian as a ruler possessing both extraordinary talent and a deep commitment to the proper administration of his domain. After presenting a lecture to Wang Jian one day in 903, the master composed the following poem,

駕馭英雄如赤子，雌黃賢哲貢瓊瑰。
六條消息心常苦，一劍晶熒敵盡摧。

You command heroes [with the sincerity] of an untainted child,
You recruit worthy literati to compose beautiful pieces;
You [manage] the “six elements” of government with an anxious heart,
You destroy enemies with a sharp sword.⁹⁴

Here, Guanxiu's verse effusively praises Wang Jian's balanced use of military and civil power. The “six elements” in the third line refer to the policies adopted by the most diligent rulers in Chinese history: maintaining soberness, encouraging education, exploiting geography, promoting the worthy, managing legal cases justly, and guaranteeing equitable taxes.⁹⁵ Believing the Shu ruler to have succeeded in all these respects, Guanxiu judged Wang Jian qualified to oversee the world.

On the emperor's birthday in 908, Guanxiu drafted a long poem in five-character classical format to celebrate both the ruler's birthday and the founding of the empire. The new regime was extolled as a reincarnation of the great Tang dynasty—“as prosperous as the enterprise of Tang” (盛如唐創業), and legitimate on this basis—“the mandate of the august Tang has been transferred” (皇唐鼎創移).⁹⁶

In his writings, Guanxiu frequently compared the Shu emperor to ancient kings and meritorious past emperors. In a series of poems celebrating Wang Jian's climb to the top of a Buddhist pagoda, likely dated 904, Guanxiu declared that the ruler was the reincarnation of Ashoka (ca. 300–232 BCE), the great Indian king, as well as a ruler who cared for his people and country like the ancient sage king Yao.⁹⁷ These analogies definitely served to advance Wang Jian's impending enthronement. In another composition written for Wang Jian's birthday sometime after 907, the master pointed out that the founding of Shu was “consistent with the Mandate of Heaven” (承天眷命) and Wang Jian was “a sage succeeding the ancient sages” (以聖繼聖). In his verse, Guanxiu placed the Shu emperor on par with the two great sage kings, Yao and Shun, writing that “the reign [of Wang Jian] will unquestionably last as long as that of Yao” (享國如堯，不疑不疑).⁹⁸ Guanxiu compared

Wang Jian's military talent to Gaozu of the Han and Taizong of the Tang: "Your Majesty inherits Gaozu's generalship and Taizong's command of armies, your virtue expanding by the day" (漢高將將，太宗兵柄，吾皇則之，日新德盛).⁹⁹ In a series of seven poems, Guanxiu recorded the achievements of Wang Jian's rule. The poems' titles indicate specific points of the ruler's success: "Auspices Delivered" (千載降祥), "Balance of Military and Civilian" (文有武備), "Accepting Expostulations" (從諫如流), "Expanding Recruitment" (搜揚草澤), "Guarding the Borders" (守在四夷), "Resuscitating the Three Religions" (大興三教) and "The Summons of Subjects" (山呼萬歲). In the end, he concluded that "Your majesty is the King Yao" (吾皇即帝堯).¹⁰⁰

Wang Jian surely appreciated the utility of Guanxiu's poems. He often visited the Longhua monastery 龍華禪院, a temple built specially for the master, to listen to Guanxiu's recitation of his newly written poems.¹⁰¹ The emperor's reliance on Guanxiu even extended to practical matters of statecraft. He once led his adult sons on an expedition to visit the master, perhaps expecting Guanxiu to resolve the issue of imperial succession that was then vexing him.¹⁰² Guanxiu spent the rest of his life in Shu and received many imperial honors, including a grand title believed to be the longest imperially bestowed designation in Chinese history.¹⁰³ Learning of the death of Guanxiu in late 912, the emperor "lapsed into deep sorrow for a long time" (戚然久之), arranging a dignified funeral with elaborate mourning rituals performed by Daoists and Buddhists.¹⁰⁴

To be sure, the religious zeal of Wang Jian never compromised the emperor's imperial authority or weakened his control over religious groups. When he initiated a project to expand the palace, he did not hesitate to destroy the famous Daoist abbey, Yuju hua 玉局化, one of the twenty-four divine Daoist abodes, to create space for his new project.¹⁰⁵ It seems that the ruler's fondness for religion primarily stemmed from pragmatic considerations and, like many monarchs in Chinese history, the Shu emperor refused to compromise his political interests. When his authority was challenged by Daoists or Buddhists, Wang Jian handled them with a merciless iron fist. As early as 901, when a local Daoist in East Chuan agitated for resistance against the new ruler, Wang Jian

brutally suppressed the rebels at the earliest moment.¹⁰⁶ Sources record an attempted insurgency in Chengdu, allegedly led by a Daoist priest named Li Hao 李昊. The conspiracy was ruthlessly put down before it started, and Li Hao was executed on a Daoist holiday, no less.¹⁰⁷ When they violated the laws, Buddhist monks did not escape severe punishment either. In 914, when the emperor visited a monastery in Chengdu, four of his court maids absconded. Apprehended a day later, the girls confessed that the monks in the monastery had enticed them to flee. The punishment that followed was extremely brutal: the four runaway girls and twenty-two accused monks were publicly executed together.¹⁰⁸

Obviously, Wang Jian's vigorous patronage of both Buddhism and Daoism was part of his strategy to use the two popular religions to supplement other devices to boost the legitimacy of his regime. He believed religion should serve the state, not vice versa. This pragmatism is an important characteristic of Wang Jian's response to religion during his reign.¹⁰⁹

IN THE EMPEROR'S NAME: RITUAL AND SYMBOL

One of the most striking features of dynastic China is the enormous importance of ritual and symbol to political authority. Beginning in the Qin period, monarchs of each dynasty, especially founding emperors, actively adopted ritual and symbol to legitimize dominance.¹¹⁰ Aided by literati advisors, Wang Jian developed a wide range of symbolic legitimizing devices associated with imperial authority: suburban sacrifices, state calendars, general amnesties, proclamations of portents, and so forth. These symbols helped confirm Wang Jian's imperial status and mobilize forces to consolidate his rule at all levels of society in Shu.

The association of sacrifice with state has a long tradition in China. Since the Zhou dynasty, people had regarded sacrifice as "highly significant among affairs of state" (*guo zhi dashi* 國之大事).¹¹¹ Later, Chinese rulers performed elaborate sacrifices each season to divinities and nature spirits, such as Heaven and Earth, as well as to their ancestors. Among them, the suburban sacrifice to Heaven (*jiaotian* 郊天), a ritual developed

in the Han dynasty, was considered most important. Performed with august pomp on a round altar (*yuanqiu* 圓丘) in the southern suburb of the capital, this ritual was designed to facilitate the Son of Heaven's "communication" with the gods, thus confirming the ruler as supreme mediator between the celestial and the human realms.¹¹² In the eyes of Confucians, "Among the responsibilities of a monarch, none is more crucial than following the order of Heaven; and to follow Heaven, nothing is more crucial than suburban sacrifices" (帝王之事莫大乎承天之序, 承天之序莫重於郊祀).¹¹³ The suburban sacrifice to Heaven took on even greater symbolic moment in the Tang dynasty, as rulers gave it a prominent place in accession ceremonies and selected the Supreme God of Haotian 昊天上帝 as the sole object of worship. It meant that the Tang emperor was now the son and alter-ego of a single, supreme, and omnipotent deity. As Howard Wechsler points out, "the condition of one supreme deity in Heaven was congruent with that of one supreme autocrat on earth" and consequently, "the emperor's worship of Heaven validated his own status relative to the rest of the empire."¹¹⁴

Not surprisingly, most potentates of the Five Dynasties period paid a lot of attention to suburban sacrifices. For example, both Zhu Wen and Li Cunxu frequently performed suburban rituals after their accessions. Another warlord of the day, Liu Shouguang 劉守光 (d. 914), even arrogated this imperial rite before proclaiming himself emperor. The importance of suburban sacrifices during the period is vividly seen in the case of Zhu Youzhen, the last emperor of the Liang. Because he had yet to hold the suburban sacrifice years after his enthronement, his courtiers complained that this made the ruler "no different from any regional lord, causing the world to belittle him" (無異藩侯, 為四方所輕). The rulers of the Five Dynasties universally regarded suburban sacrifices as both a confirmation of their self-proclaimed status as "emperor" and an indispensable means of proving their legitimacy to the public.¹¹⁵

With the help of the experienced Wei Zhuang, the primary architect of the Shu rites, Wang Jian planned a comprehensive state ritual program, placing particular emphasis on the suburban sacrifices. Altars for sacrifices were constructed in the suburbs of Chengdu by the fall of 907.

In the first month of 908, Wang Jian offered his first sacrifice to Heaven, which was followed by a general amnesty and an order to adopt the new reign name, “Wucheng.”¹¹⁶ By conforming to orthodox political traditions, Wang Jian placed himself in the line of orthodox succession from the past. More suburban sacrifices were performed later. For instance, in the summer of 917, when Wang Jian changed the state title to Great Han 大漢, he sacrificed to the Yellow Emperor 黃帝, and on the next day made offerings to the gods of earth. Later in that winter, the ruler organized a grand sacrifice to the Supreme God of Haotian at the round altar.¹¹⁷ Wang Jian did not strictly follow the Tang precedent of worshipping a single deity at the suburban sacrifice, but sought to validate his imperial status by invoking a wider pantheon of divinities.

Wang Jian also used other tools associated with imperial authority, such as general amnesty (*dashe* 大赦) and the adoption of reign names (*gaiyuan* 改元), to convey a sense of majesty to the public. General amnesties are a uniquely Chinese political institution meant to broadcast the beneficence of the throne. Amnesties were often extended to groups of criminals and outlaws, who might be released on occasions such as the emperor’s accession date, his birthday, or the celebrations of military victories. Symbolically, this act affirmed the emperor as the only man with the power over life and death. Amnesties often occasioned a change in reign name, reflecting the start of a new calendar and the emperor’s control over time.¹¹⁸ As mentioned in chapter 4, by rejecting the reign name “Tianyou” and adhering to the preceding “Tianfu,” Wang Jian could repudiate the rule of the Liang and aver his loyalty to the Tang cause. After he established the Shu empire, reign-name changes became a useful tool to highlight his “imperial” power. During Wang Jian’s reign from 907 to 918, at least eight amnesties were promulgated, and the reign name changed five times.¹¹⁹ The successive amnesties and changes of reign name reflect Wang Jian’s zeal to prove his identity as emperor.

Calendars and music also afforded rulers like Wang Jian a ceremonial stage to announce their political legitimacy. If one examines Chinese history, nearly every dynasty had its own calendar, and the short-lived

regimes of the Central Plains during the Five Dynasties were no exception. By creating and promulgating a new calendar, each dynasty sought to distinguish itself from its immediate predecessor, and more importantly, to manifest a “new order” of rule.¹²⁰ In the fall of 909, Wang Jian adopted the Yongchang (Forever Prosperous) Calendar 永昌曆, and three years later he switched to another one entitled the Zhengxiang (Authentic Phenomena) Calendar 正象曆, both conceived by Hu Xiulin, the former state astronomer of the Tang.¹²¹ Wang Jian’s program of court music also manifested Shu’s self-conscious emulation of Tang precedent in its practice of imperial rituals. Palace music and performance flourished quickly at his court. In 908, Wang Jian converted musicians from provincial to imperial service under the title of the Imperial Musician Workshop (Jiaofang 教坊), consistent with the Tang’s institution. It must have been very large, given the number of musicians subsequently captured by Later Tang troops.¹²²

The Former Shu was also well known for its frequent reporting of auspicious omens, auguries, and miracles. Seen as signs revealing the will of Heaven, portents had been manipulated by the ruling class to legitimize their dominance since the early Han period.¹²³ The appearance of auspicious portents like dragons, fragrant smoke, colored clouds, rare animals, and prophetic dreams were believed to reflect Heaven’s sanction of a future ruler. Conversely, inauspicious portents like eclipses, droughts, locusts, and weird animals indicated Heaven’s displeasure with the current ruler, calling for drastic reform or a new dynasty. The early Tang rulers were known for their skillful use of portents to justify their succession. Potentates of the Five Dynasties period also eagerly manipulated auspicious portents for their own legitimation purposes.¹²⁴

Wang Jian invoked such symbols to demonstrate Heaven’s sanction of his rule in the Shu. As early as in 907, shortly before he enthroned himself, nearly all the prefectures of Shu reported auspicious animals like the phoenix and dragon, Heaven’s signs endorsing his accession.¹²⁵

Such reports did not cease after 907. Sources record dozens of reports of auspicious omens during the reign of Wang Jian, mostly dragons, the most explicit symbol of imperial power.¹²⁶ One extraordinary report

emanated from Jinzhou in 910. In the words of the prefect Wang Zonglang 王宗朗, one day, at a small temple near the Xu River 洵水 dark clouds suddenly descended and strange sounds continued day and night. Then, fifty dragons emerged from the river, chasing one another for the next three days.¹²⁷ Obviously, Wang Jian's fondness for portents, especially dragons, caused an energetic response from his subordinates. They even proceeded to fabricate reports of still more auspicious animals without considering their actual effect on legitimation in the long term. In his chronicle of the Former Shu, Ouyang Xiu offers a long commentary focusing on the myths and superstitions perpetrated by Wang Jian and their negative effect: "For such omens of kingly rule as the unicorn, phoenix, tortoise, and dragon to make appearances in the Five Dynasties era—and be sighted in Shu no less—this is incredulous even for someone otherwise favorably disposed to theories of auguries and omens" (麟鳳龜龍，王者之瑞，而出於五代之際，又皆萃於蜀，此雖好為祥瑞之說者亦可疑也). Inasmuch as "the Wang royal house was undeserving [of such visitations]" (王氏不足以當之), the reporting generated more scandal than legitimacy for its potentate. Though Song historians might have found him an unworthy ruler, Wang Jian missed no chance to use "heavenly" signs to justify his rule in Shu, where superstitions were deep-rooted in popular culture.¹²⁸

Political prophecy associated with "apocryphal" (*chenwei* 讖緯) texts played an important role in Wang Jian's legitimation.¹²⁹ By creating, transmitting and interpreting assorted prophecies, Wang Jian and his advisors deployed a popular vehicle of rhetorical and ideological sanction. Zhou Dequan 周德權 (d. 911), the brother of one of Wang Jian's consorts, made a special contribution to the founding of his empire in 907 by interpreting a sentence from an abstruse prophecy. The line reads: "*Li you xi Wang feng jichang, tude duixing dan mo dang*" (李佑西王逢吉昌，土德兌興丹莫當). Zhou deciphered the word "Li you" as a reference to the fall of the Tang; "xi Wang" alludes to the rise of the Wang house in the West, and the character "feng" resembles Wang Jian's personal name (*Jian* 建) in form. After the Earth virtue of Tang had declined, the Liang of Zhu Wen, symbolized by the character "dan"

(literally meaning “red,” the same as “*zhu* 朱”), would fail in attempts to challenge Shu. So the prophecy can be translated in this way: “The house of Wang rises in West China as the Tang collapses, and the new dynasty succeeds the mandate and surpasses the Liang.” Then Zhou concluded, “Your majesty should follow Heaven’s will embodied in this precious prophecy” (願稽合天命，仰應寶籙). Upon learning of the auspicious interpretation, Wang Jian rejoiced, praising Zhou as a man “who helps further the goal of the empire” (*cheng wo zhe* 成我者).¹³⁰

More stories about Wang Jian’s use of *chenwei* deserve mention here. During the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods, another prophecy circulated widely in the Shu: “Rabbit on the gold chair” (兔子上金床), attributed to a Daoist in the early Tianfu era. Its meaning is clear: Wang Jian, a man born in the year of the Rabbit (847), was destined to be an emperor in 907, another Rabbit year in the Chinese zodiac system.¹³¹ In the spring of 912, a precious jade was found by an official in the former Chengdu residence of Tian Lingzi, and a line was engraved on the surface: “A man of virtue follows Heaven, whose enterprise is forever prosperous” (有德承天，其祚永昌). Because of these auspicious words, Wang Jian treated the object as a national treasure.¹³² The Shu emperor’s deliberate use of prophecy can also be seen in another account. In the summer of 912, a peasant found a bronze plate at Hanzhou, which bore a short paragraph describing a royal “Wang” house of lasting fortune. According to the text, the founding ruler was born on the same date as Wang Jian, and this ruler would enjoy a longevity of two hundred years before passing power to his successor named Wang Yuanying 王元膺. Believing this text in the “ancient” script, Wang Jian changed the personal name of his heir-apparent to Yuanying to correspond to the Heaven’s will.¹³³

Architecture served as another symbolic vehicle for Wang Jian’s legitimation. Modern studies have revealed the meaning of architectural forms as an effective metaphor for the construction of authority. For example, the impressive palaces and majestic urban designs of Tang Chang’an were pregnant with symbolic meaning to convince the viewer of the legitimacy of the dynasty.¹³⁴ After Wang Jian proclaimed himself

FIGURE 5. Imperial Insignia of Wang Jian.

emperor, he paid similar attention to palace construction in Chengdu, with the clear intent of elevating his abode to an appropriate new status. In a convenient and expeditious method, one applied by most regional lords of the day, he erected a palace city (*gongcheng* 宮城) based on the old governor's hall (*yacheng* 牙城), while remodeling the former inner city (*zicheng* 子城) to be the new imperial city. Enlarged by a field previously owned by a Daoist temple, the new imperial city was apparently larger than the old inner city. Some gates were opened around the newly enlarged walls, including the famous Gate of Enlisting Worthies (Dexian men 得賢門), which was used for holding grand rituals.¹³⁵

In the eyes of Wang Jian, the palaces deserved more attention, both in name and form. In his inaugural edict, he ordered a change in all the names of buildings in the palace city, elevating former “halls” (*tang* 堂, *yu* 宇, *ting* 廳, *guan* 館) to “palaces” (*gong* 宮 and *dian* 殿). The purpose, in his words, was “to rectify the viewings” (*yi zheng guanzhan* 以正觀瞻).¹³⁶

By using the “appropriate” names corresponding to his new status, Wang Jian tried to convince his people that he had already transformed himself from a governor to an emperor. This intent can also be seen from the renaming of a pond to the west of the inner palace. Wang Jian altered the pond’s name from “*Mohe* 摩訶,” an abbreviation of a Sanskrit term meaning “water containing dragon,” to “*Longyue* 龍躍,” explicitly bearing the character “dragon.”¹³⁷ Interestingly, some of the new names adopted by Wang Jian, such as Five-Phoenix Hall (Wufeng lou 五鳳樓) and Great Peace Gate (Da’an men 大安門), mimicked the names of Tang palaces in Chang’an. As Hu Sanxing observes, “Shu imitated the construction of the Tang palaces” (蜀宮仿唐宮之制).¹³⁸ This was part of a broader emulation of the Tang by the former Tang general for purposes of political legitimacy.

The emperor also had halls for murals established at palaces and monasteries, following the practice of Tang rulers. In 915 Wang Jian erected a hall of self-portraits by famous artists. He also established a Hall for Upholding Heaven (Futian ge 扶天閣), a miniature of the famous Hall of Transcending Clouds (Lingyan ge 凌煙閣) of the Tang, a gallery that held images of all the meritorious commanders and advisors.¹³⁹ The artwork in the religious cloisters served his ideological ends, too. Because the vast majority of Chinese were illiterate, Buddhist monasteries and Daoist abbeys commissioned artists to paint murals depicting aspects of their beliefs that the unlettered could grasp. As a record describes, the fresco of a dragon done by a famous artist at a Daoist temple was so realistic that visitors flooded to see it, but nobody dared to approach it.¹⁴⁰

A “BENEVOLENT” RULER FOR THE PEOPLE

The chaotic Five Dynasties period is usually depicted by traditional historians as one of the bleakest eras in Chinese history. Most of the contemporary rulers are portrayed as militant, brutal, and rapacious usurpers, men eager to exploit the people with little concern for the local economy. Not surprisingly, the greater fragmentation of south China, the tumultuous “Ten States,” is cast in an even darker light. Ouyang Xiu,

for example, characterized the era as politically decadent and its ruling elites as inordinately “debauched” and “uncivil.”¹⁴¹ Wang Fuzhi harshly criticized the rulers of the “Ten States” for lack of commitment to “benefiting the people” (*sheng min* 生民).¹⁴² This perception remains popular today, as indicated by a distinguished Chinese scholar, who complains that current research on the Five Dynasties period “stresses the dark side, while neglecting the protection and appeasement of the people [by local overlords].”¹⁴³

In fact, rulers of the Five Dynasties period were just as conscientious as the best of Chinese rulers. Apart from Cheng Rui and Gao Jichang, mentioned in chapter 4, numerous other potentates in the north and south sought to foster the local economy after establishing relative political stability. For example, Yang Xingmi of Huainan, Wang Chao of Min, and Ma Yin of Chu all paid close attention to the development of agriculture and trade in their domains.¹⁴⁴ Even the notorious Zhu Wen, after unifying the middle and lower Yellow River region, had also “encouraged agriculture, reduced taxes, proved lenient towards peasants, and generally aided agrarian recovery.”¹⁴⁵ The reasons for these “lenient” policies can well be imagined: the development of local economy would build the revenue base needed for a strong army and national defense. More importantly, a military ruler needed the support of his people to secure his dominance, especially those like Wang Jian who aspired to be “emperor.”

Admittedly, Wang Jian’s occupation of Shu in the late ninth century introduced undesirable ferment to the region and initially stymied the local economy. As the *Old History of Five Dynasties* reports, the prefectures of West Chuan “universally suffered atrocities as a consequence of his conquest” (皆罹其毒).¹⁴⁶ In order to support his army during the unification drive, Wang Jian imposed very heavy taxes on the local people after 891.¹⁴⁷ But once he ascended the throne, he realized the importance of cooperating with the local populace to sustain his empire for the long term. Understandably, such local support could not be obtained unless military excesses were curbed. More importantly, he grew to understand that, as an aspiring emperor, one of the most vital missions was to take care of his people. This mission can be defined by the Confucian term

“benevolent governance” (*renzheng* 仁政), a concept surely introduced to the new ruler by his Confucian advisors. In this sense, efforts to promote people’s livelihood carried high political currency, helping qualify Wang Jian to be a kingly “emperor” of this turbulent age. Thus Wang Jian’s principal task was to persuade the people that his rule represented a shift toward a stable economy, polity, and society.

There is evidence that Wang Jian and some of his followers had long recognized the necessity of caring for the people’s livelihood from the outset of the military conquest. As early as 891, after Chengdu was conquered, Wang Jian announced the inauguration of a “generous and benevolent governance” (*kuanren zhi zheng* 寬仁之政) to alleviate “the longtime suffering of millions of people” (萬民久罹塗炭).¹⁴⁸ This policy was adopted by some commanders, including Wang Zongshou, who made strenuous efforts to “attract and appease refugees” (*anji lisan* 安輯離散) while reconstituting the local economy at Guozhou 果州 (today’s Nanchong of Sichuan province), a prefecture seized in the late ninth century. In another case, the prefect Zhang Lin 張琳 repaired the dams along the Min River to the great benefit of agriculture.¹⁴⁹

Similarly, literati advisors in Shu often strongly advocated benevolent policies. In the early 900s, when a county magistrate was accused of extracting too much from the local people, the military secretary Wei Zhuang drafted a verdict on behalf of Wang Jian, warning local officials: “In a period of such misery, [we] should remove the misery, so that [the people] will not suffer anew after so recently recovering from old wounds” (正當凋瘵之秋，好安凋瘵，勿使瘡痍之後，複作瘡痍).¹⁵⁰ Obviously, Wei intended to draw Wang Jian’s attention to people still suffering from the cost of military occupation. In another account, Feng Juan submitted a poem on Wang Jian’s birthday in 904, in which the savvy secretary first extolled the ruler’s former achievements, then illustrated the suffering of the Shu people and tactfully advised Wang Jian to alleviate excessive taxes. His skillful expostulation caused a remorseful ruler to assert, “Following your loyal admonition, I have no worry about achieving great enterprise” (如君忠諫，功業何憂).¹⁵¹ Consequently, taxes were reduced.

The local Shu elite surely welcomed this benevolent policy. One source states that an influential local magnate, who had supplied provisions to Wang Jian's army, once affirmed his appreciation for the potentate, "Your Highness will surely pacify this region. If not, the two Circuits of Chuan will revert to the fodder of [some rapacious leaders]" (願公安輯一方，不然兩川皆魚肉矣). The prospective emperor of Shu accepted his petition.¹⁵²

There is no doubt that Wang Jian fully understood the special need for peace and prosperity in Shu. He issued a personal proclamation espousing "benevolent governance" at the beginning of 908, and at the same time he promulgated his first edict as emperor of a unified Shu. His new position made the mission of caring for the people even more symbolic. The emperor expressed heightened anxieties in the edict, "After ascending the throne, every time I think of the economic hardship of the people and the plethora of penal cases, I am doubly concerned" (一從踐位以來，倍軫臨深之懼，每念生靈塗炭，刑政猶繁). Though he admitted that ongoing military needs made it impossible to abolish taxes, Wang Jian promised to "spread imperial favor across all areas under his jurisdiction" (合流恩於屬縣).¹⁵³

A series of "benevolent" policies were detailed in the edict. The most remarkable included a two-month remission of rural taxes in 907, a twenty percent reduction in taxes for the coming summer, the return of confiscated properties to the original owners, and the freeing of fugitives from conscript service. Legal issues were historically important as a symbol of good government, and they received due attention. Wang Jian's policies included a general amnesty as well as a promise of thorough examination into cases of reputed injustice. Social welfare also received special attention. For example, the edict committed the government to supply people over eighty with grain. Financial assistance to bury the dead was extended to the poor, while orphans received government assistance. The new court turned to local magistrates to implement the policies. Besides encouraging them to promote the local economy and care for the people, Wang Jian designed strict rules to reduce bureaucratic corruption. First, he standardized measuring utensils used by the local government to collect taxes, which were paid in rice. Second, he authorized commoners

to bring lawsuits directly to the court, if they believed their magistrates to be corrupt in collecting taxes. Guilty officials were punished harshly and not granted any general pardon. These policies were based on a simple rule: “Anything that will benefit the people should be introduced, while all that harms the administration must be eliminated” (有利於民者不得不用，有害於政者不得不除). The ultimate goal of the effort was “a justice that leads to peace among people and riches that will make for a powerful state” (公平必致於民安，富庶自成於國霸).¹⁵⁴

In the summer of 910, Wang Jian issued another edict to encourage agriculture, demanding that all prefects and county magistrates “benefit and appease” (*hui sui* 惠綏) the people, not disturb or hurt them, so as to “make my people enjoy farming on their lands” (使我赤子，樂於南畝).¹⁵⁵ In another edict, Wang Jian instructed his heir apparent to remember the basic principle of ruling: “[A ruler should] protect the peace of his people” (保安於烝人).¹⁵⁶ Some Shu governors actively followed his directive. For instance, Jin Hui, governor of Wutai, attracted a large number of fugitive peasants and restored local agriculture. Another governor of East Chuan once expressed the same belief: “Foodstuffs determine the livelihood of the people, so how could we not [facilitate them] to work industriously on agriculture” (食者，民之命也，不可不勤其稼穡).¹⁵⁷

It should be noted that the economic development of Shu under Wang Jian’s reign was directly associated with state control. State-run factories (*zuoyuan* 作院) existed widely in Chengdu.¹⁵⁸ Some profitable commodities like tea, liquor, and salt were placed under a tightly controlled monopoly. Criminals accused of smuggling salt and tea were excluded from the general amnesty, indicating the seriousness of their crimes. Later, the emperor appointed special commissioners of salt wells (*Jing-yanshi* 井鹽使) in some salt-producing areas, and elevated to “prefecture” a small county in East Chuan due to its salt revenues. These actions demonstrate increased attention to salt control.¹⁵⁹

The state’s participation in trade deserves further discussion. On the one hand, it fostered economic expansion, and on the other, it allowed greedy Shu elites to amass vast wealth—an approach that conflicted with Wang Jian’s professed “benevolence.” Sources show that the state

imposed no restrictions on local officials' involvement in commerce and even the imperial clan proved eager to profit from trade both within Shu and with neighboring states.¹⁶⁰ Such moral ambivalence reflects precisely the complex character of Wang Jian as an upstart, a man who oscillated between the idealism linked to political legitimacy and the eminently pragmatic need for material wealth. It is inconceivable that a military ruler like Wang Jian could act as a "sagacious monarch" without heed to pragmatic concerns. Indeed, at times, Wang Jian seemed more avaricious than most potentates of his day. In one account, Wang Jian, seeing a crowd of people selling and buying mulberry saplings at a market, remarked to his attendants: if the court impose taxes on such trade, "huge profits will surely accrue" (必獲厚利).¹⁶¹

Admittedly, such ambivalence in Wang Jian's rule might lead us to believe that those "benevolent" policies in edicts might be better understood as imperial rhetoric than as a reality of the state. Yet one must admit that Wang Jian realized the importance of developing the local economy, and often accepted Confucian advice to focus attention on the livelihood of the people, a source of stability and legitimacy. As a result, Shu was known for its "overflowing barns" (*canglin chongying* 倉廩充溢) and relatively wealthy commoners.¹⁶² The increase in Shu's agricultural production and wealth also stimulated trade. To meet the surging demand for circulating currency in domestic commerce, the Shu court issued new coins four times during Wang Jian's reign.¹⁶³ The region gradually recovered some of the prosperity it had enjoyed during Tang times, laying an economic foundation for the future boom of the Song period.¹⁶⁴ Although Wang Jian's economic policies occasionally fell short of his idealistic rhetoric, the Shu people still enjoyed a prosperous economy, an improved living standard and, more importantly, a precious peace. This constituted a solid foundation for the rule of Wang Jian in Shu.

HISTORY RECOVERED AND INVENTED

History is a tool often used by modern states to legitimize their rule. By remembering, recovering and even inventing a history, a state can

establish a historical foundation for the origin of its rule and shape a collective memory that helps to strengthen the loyalties of its members. The use of history to legitimize a regime is not a novel invention. To justify his authority, Wang Jian adroitly manipulated history in two ways: he honored local separatist regimes in Shu in order to validate his own separation; and he patronized the writing of history, especially records about himself, to recast his disgrace in the late Tang in a favorable manner. Both methods bolstered the legitimacy of the Shu, a regime built by a northerner who faced the difficult challenge of winning over Shu natives.

In Chinese history, many emperors have sought to increase their legitimacy by connecting themselves with tradition. By linking the present to some glorious past era or figure, the ruler hoped to exalt his own status. The rulers of the Five Dynasties used such a method widely. In most cases, due to the limited size of their domains, those regional potentates cited locally entrenched and respected predecessors for the purpose of legitimation. For example, Wang Tinghan 王延翰 (r. 925–926) of Min once showed ministers a passage in a historical book, pointing to the omission of the kings of ancient Min-Yue. Inasmuch as Min had never been a part of the Chinese empire, his founding of a new empire was justified in restoring the ancient dignity.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, in the case of the Former Shu, Wang Jian attempted to harness the rich local history, drawing local traditions of diverse historical, cultural and religious provenance into the orbit of the imperial cult to further strengthen a regional identity of the Shu.

The distinctive geography of the Shu region, especially West Chuan, centered on the Chengdu Plain, helped form unique cultural traditions. The region also had a history of frequent separation from central China prior to Wang Jian's era. Therefore, shaping a distinct Shu identity among its people was comparatively easy.¹⁶⁶ When Wang Jian and his followers entered Shu, some sense of alienation and distrust, if not hostility, naturally occurred among the Shu people. Although local magnates and newly arrived northerners generally welcomed the powerful military man, whom they anticipated would achieve a lasting peace in Shu, the majority of the common Shu people likely still refused to trust

the potentate from the north. Wang Jian thus needed to prove that he willingly shared and accepted the Shu identity of the locals, and thus “represented” the interests of the Shu people. To this end, he patronized some local religious Daoist deities and developed the Shu economy, as discussed previously, and sponsored the promotion of historical figures of Shu. For example, he bestowed on Li Bing 李冰 (fl. third century BCE), a Shu governor who had contributed to Shu by building a grand dam on the Min River, the title “Prince of Great Peace” (Da’an wang 大安王).¹⁶⁷ Clearly, Wang Jian consciously strengthened his ties to a Shu identity, and further directed it to serve his power.

Wang Jian fostered the idea that the ruling house of the Former Shu was affiliated, if not by lineage, at least in spirit, to past sovereign houses of the Shu area by dedicating shrines to the rulers of the past and regularly offering sacrifices to them. He held the Shu-Han state from the Three Kingdoms period in particularly high esteem, styling it a “political ancestor” of Shu and assigning it a role in his legitimacy as great as that of the Tang dynasty. Even before the Shu empire was formally founded, contemporaries used Liu Bei, the founding emperor of the Shu-Han, to refer to Wang Jian, the governor of West Chuan at that time, implying his *de facto* independence in Shu and foreshadowing his imperial rise. In 907, supporters of Wang Jian encouraged him to “act on the precedent of Liu Bei” (行劉備故事) and ascend the throne.¹⁶⁸ The Shu emperor fully recognized the significance of such references. In his first edict in 908, Wang Jian bestowed honorary titles on Liu Bei and his loyal minister Zhuge Liang. Two years later, in another edict, he cited the Shu-Han again, promising to follow the benevolent economic policies of Liu Bei after his unification of China.¹⁶⁹ At the end of 916, Wang Jian even announced a change in the state title from “Shu” to “Han,” the same appellation as Liu Bei’s regime. In his own explanation, this was because recent feats had been “aided by the powerful spirit of the former sages [of Shu-Han]” (皆資先哲之威靈). He added, “It is appropriate to resume the old state title to repay their merits” (上答元功, 宜尊舊號).¹⁷⁰ Later, Wang Jian enshrined the ministers of Shu-Han and other venerable historical figures related to Shu, including Zhang Yi 張儀

(d. 309 BCE), Zhang Lu 張魯 (d. 216), Zhang Fei 張飛 (d. 221), Deng Ai 鄧艾 (197–264).¹⁷¹ Through such actions, Wang Jian exploited the figures' symbolism by conferring official titles on them and incorporating them into the state cult, thereby establishing a link between Shu regimes in the past and the new authority in the present.

According to one record, Wang Jian thoroughly enjoyed a painting drawn by a famed artist on a wall in his palace, a work that depicted Zhuge Liang's crossing of the Lu River 瀘水 with his armies on a military expedition to the south. "So heroic, mounted knights clad in armor" (壯哉甲馬), the emperor gasped in admiration every time he passed by the wall.¹⁷² Such a painting served as a visual representation reminding members of the court of the connection between Wang Jian and his illustrious predecessors.

Similarly, the recent past deeply concerned Wang Jian. A military man who had risen to power by attacking Langzhou and fighting his way to Chengdu without the permission of the Tang court, Wang Jian lacked a legitimate "genesis." Thus he needed to find a way to justify his conquest of Shu and recast his image. Like most rulers who rise to greatness from humble origins, Wang Jian sought to conceal and embellish his undistinguished origins by rewriting history.

Historians generally agree that those in power control the presentation of the past to a very large extent, and seek to present a version of past events that serves to buttress and legitimize their authority and to confirm their political achievements. Thus, the writing of history can provide a new vision of the past customized to fit such rulers' present needs and aspirations for the future. Their aim is to amend, to restate, to replace, or even to recreate the past in a more satisfactory form.¹⁷³ This method of historical reconstruction was very popular during the chaotic Five Dynasties era, in which nearly all the regional potentates had ignoble origins, many having come to power through military coups or assassinations. For example, by sponsoring the compilation of the Veritable Records (*shilu* 實錄) for their political predecessors, rulers of the five northern dynasties, each having served the former regime, attempted to conceal their disgraceful paths to power and legitimize their ascendancies.¹⁷⁴

Wang Jian paid close attention to the writing of history. Though an uneducated military man, he had long recognized the normative influence of history. In a memorial, Wang Kai petitioned the emperor to follow the model of some famed rulers in Chinese history, by attending to the collection and compilation of historical records that could be “passed on to the later generations” (*yi chuan houshi* 以傳後世).¹⁷⁵ Wang Jian followed his advice. An official organ of history compilation and document collection, the History Office (*Shiguan* 史館) was established soon after the founding of the Shu, charged with preserving the historical records of the Tang.¹⁷⁶ According to Du Guangting, Wang Jian once ordered the History Office to keep one of Du’s memorials, which the emperor regarded as appropriate for his own Veritable Record.¹⁷⁷ Wang Jian initiated this project in 912, with the justification: “Since antiquity, we have depended on state historians to narrate the rise of kings and expose their conduct, be it good or bad” (自古王者之興，善惡之跡不泯者，有史臣傳之，丹青載之). Zhang Ge was appointed editor-in-chief and charged to compile a history of the Former Shu since its founding.¹⁷⁸ Some historical records about Wang Jian himself prior to 907 were likely drafted under state sponsorship. Due to the sensitive nature of these records—which dealt with his illicit occupation of Shu—Wang Jian certainly ordered these documents to be reconstituted with meticulous care, so that he might better place his own imprint on the past.

Unfortunately, all the state-sponsored historical writings on Wang Jian’s earlier career are no longer extant.¹⁷⁹ But the contents of these works, especially the parts about Wang Jian’s entering Shu, can be traced through the compilations of later historians. For example, Sima Guang’s *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi* 資治通鑑考異 refers to two works covering this history, both entitled *Jinli qijiu zhuan*, one by Zhang Jing 張青彡, the other a revision of Zhang’s work compiled by Gou Yanqing 勾延慶. The extant version of Gou’s work, if one believes the text, as well as Zhang’s lost text on which Gou’s was based, preserves much original information from the Shu state histories.¹⁸⁰ Through a comparison of these works on the subject of Wang Jian’s entering Shu with entries in the extant

official histories, one can observe how Wang Jian manipulated the historical records to disguise his illicit origins.

Strictly speaking, Wang Jian's fortune seeking in Shu started in 887, when he seized Langzhou and expanded his army. Yet nobody could deny that the very first factor leading to his final success was the invitation from Tian Lingzi, who was planning to recruit his former adopted son for his brother Chen Jingxuan's use. If he had not received Tian's letter promising to bestow "a large prefecture" on him, Wang Jian would have continued to pillage the southern Shannan West like a "brigand" (*zei* 賊), a word Tian Lingzi used to describe the conduct of Wang Jian at that time. In any case, Wang Jian's move into inner Shu was not authorized by the court, and his military assault against Chengdu and subsequent depredations were doubtless illegitimate acts. From this point of view, his attack against an officially appointed governor was tantamount to open rebellion. Only in the early winter of 888, when Chen Jingxuan refused to accept the newly court-appointed Wei Zhaodu, did Wang Jian gain a legitimate excuse to besiege Chengdu by joining Wei's army and receiving the official appointment as the governor of Yongping. Thus, there existed a span of one whole year, between Wang Jian's entering Shu and receiving an official appointment, in which all Wang Jian's military actions were not justified.

Official histories faithfully record this blemish on Wang Jian's historical reputation. Both histories of the Five Dynasties, without providing exact dates, place Tian's invitation and Wang Jian's departure for Chengdu prior to the appointment of Wei Zhaodu.¹⁸¹ The two histories of the Tang and the *Zizhi tongjian* clearly record the gap between the dates of Wang Jian's arrival and Wei's appointment, as well as the causal relation between Wang Jian's actions, Wei's arrival and the rebellion of Chen Jingxuan. More than that, the *Old History of Tang* even clearly points out that the reason that the court appointed Wei at this time was "because of the convulsion stirred up by brigand Wang Jian in Shu" (以川賊王建大亂).¹⁸²

If one looks at the two *Jinli qijiuzhuan*, the records of Wang Jian's illegitimate entering of Shu have been skillfully revised, though not

totally erased. In both works, Wang Jian's arrival and his attack against Chengdu are postponed by one or two years, so that both events occurred after Chen Jingxuan's overtly rebellious rejection of the Tang imperial order. According to Sima Guang's *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi*, Zhang Jing's work claims the court decided to send Wei to Shu in the second year of Wende (889). Upon learning the news, the terrified Tian Lingzi and Chen Jingxuan designed a plot to resist Wei: first they summoned Wang Jian from Shannan, then deliberately provoked the general in order to cause him to make turmoil in the region, in hopes of blocking the road of Wei.¹⁸³ Similarly, in the extant work by Gou Yanqing, Chen and Tian called Wang Jian to Shu for the same purpose after the court appointed Wei. The scheme of Chen-Tian is even recorded in great detail: after enticing Wang Jian to attack Shu, Chen Jingxuan proposed to accuse Wang Jian of invasion so that he could maintain his position.¹⁸⁴ Given this arrangement of the events, Wang Jian's illegitimate entering of Shu is reduced to a minimal offense. Following the logic of Shu histories, it was the evil duo of Chen-Tian, not Wang Jian, who hatched the plot and thus were culpable for the turmoil. Furthermore, by situating Wang Jian's intervention after Wei Zhaodu's appointment, the Shu histories successfully transform Wang Jian's image from that of a predatory intruder to a loyal general who actively fought the rebellious Chen Jingxuan by assisting the newly court-appointed governor. Clearly, the aim of the Shu works was to embellish the past—either by removing distasteful elements or by replacing them with something more acceptable—to reinforce the legitimacy of the emperor in the founding of the Shu.

In reviewing this complicated history of Wang Jian's entering Shu, Song historian Liu Shu 劉恕 (1032–1078) commented:

王建起兵攻成都，諸書歲月不同。蓋建成事之後，其徒以擅舉兵為恥，為之隱惡。襲據閬州，多言除移。尤諱光啟末寇西川攻陳敬瑄事，或移在文德年韋昭度鎮蜀敬瑄不受代後，或雲朝廷削奪敬瑄官爵，建始會昭度討伐，皆若受命勤王之師。

Sources vary greatly about the date of Wang Jian's military intrusion into Chengdu. The reason for this might be that after Wang

TABLE 2. The Date of Wang Jian's Entry into Shu.

<i>Sources</i>	<i>Date of Wang Jian's attack against Chengdu</i>	<i>Date of Wei Zhaodu's appointment</i>
<i>ZZTJ</i>	887/11 ^a (Guangqi 3)	888/6 (Wende 1)
<i>XTS</i>	888/6 (Wende 1)	888 (Wende 1)
<i>JTX</i>	887/12 (Guangqi 3)	888/6 (Wende 1)
<i>XWDS</i>	Before 888/6 (Wende 1)	888/6 (Wende 1)
<i>JWDS</i>	887 (Guangqi 3)	888 (Wende 1)
Zhang's <i>JLQJZ</i>	After 889/10 (Wende 2)	889/10 (Wende 2)
Gou's <i>JLQJZ</i>	888/9 (Wende 1)	888/8 (Wende 1)

^a intercalary month.

Jian succeeded, his court historians, who deemed such an illegitimate military act as shameful, concealed the evils for him, deleting records such as his invasion and conquest of Langzhou. Particularly, the attack against Jingxuan in the end of [the] Guangqi era was seen as a serious taboo; they either removed the date of this attack to the time after Zhaodu's appointment and Jingxuan's disobedience, or claimed that Jian joined Zhaodu as the court deprived Jingxuan of his offices—in both cases, Wang Jian's army was dubbed as the one that had received imperial orders to aid the court.

Little wonder that contemporary histories, either written by Shu historians or compiled later based on Shu state records, as the Song historian observes, “mutually contradict each other” (自相抵牾) as to the sequence and nature of these events.¹⁸⁵

From the examination above, one can see that Wang Jian favored maintaining the stability of Shu once he succeeded in unifying the area and founding his own state. To transform himself from a military governor of the Tang to a sovereign emperor, he relied on the literati to help establish a civilian government and legitimize his new rule. As a military man who came from the north and rose to power through war, Wang Jian

sought to justify his authority in Shu by casting himself as a legitimate successor of the Tang dynasty, a benevolent emperor in the fashion of the sage kings, as well as a ruler who respected the history and regional identity of Shu. More notably, in his legitimation process, the ruler was not, in fact, pursuing universal rule over “all under Heaven” (*tianxia* 天下), though such rhetoric was still in use. Rather, fully recognizing his own limited capacity and the political situation in this divided period, the emperor shifted his attention to gaining the support of the Shu people and maintaining his regional sovereignty.

It might be hard to judge the efficacy of Wang Jian’s legitimation efforts and how seriously the Shu people took them, but it is certain that he shared the goal of maintaining stability in Shu with both the local populace and exiled northern elites, who lent their support to and even actively collaborated with the military ruler.

When Wang Jian boasted of his legitimate succession to the Tang by quoting the prophecy “rabbit on the gold chair,” the people, as a source depicts, “derided him [in private]” (*chi zhi* 嗤之), apparently taking it as a joke.¹⁸⁶ In another story, Feng Juan once jeered at the ruler who was attempting to hide his criminal record before joining the army, which suggests that the emperor’s disgraceful background was widely known among his subjects.¹⁸⁷ Yet such a situation did not seriously undermine the ruler’s domination, and the Shu people, enjoying peace and prosperity, might have willingly accepted his authority. About a decade later, when the Later Tang army conquered the Shu, the people of Shu sighed, “now we will suffer misfortune again” (蜀人自此重不幸也), expressing a yearning for the erstwhile stability under Wang Jian’s rule.¹⁸⁸

CHAPTER 6

CRISIS AND COLLAPSE, 915–925

劍蜀金湯孰敢爭，子陽才業匪雄英。方知在德不在險，危棧
何曾阻漢兵。

*Who dares to challenge the iron walls and scalding moats of Shu,
Especially in the face of Ziyang's heroism?
Natural obstacles hardly stopped the advance of Han armies,
So we know that success lies in virtue, not perilous terrain.*

—Zhou Tan 周曇 (fl. ninth century), “Gongsun Shu” 公孫述¹

Late on a wintry night in 915, Wang Zongkan, chief commander of the palace guards, received an urgent report that the palace compound was on fire. The terrified general immediately amassed his men at the west palace gate, intending to enter the inner court to help put the fire out. But to his surprise, the gate was tightly closed from inside and nobody was allowed to enter. It turned out to be an order directly from the emperor. Without enough hands to fight the conflagration, flames soon swallowed most of

the palace buildings, including the one preserving Wang Jian's most cherished collection of treasures. When the fire was totally extinguished in the early morning, the emperor finally came out to meet his courtiers. He first ordered the civil officials to prepare a sacrifice to the royal ancestral temple, a customary practice of Chinese imperial rulers after natural disasters, and then required his military commanders to assign more patrol troops to maintain order in the capital. After announcing these two directives, Wang Jian returned to the nearly ruined palace and locked the gates again. It is said that the emperor had to rely on the food and other supplies offered by his officials in the following days. Yet the senile emperor, obviously worried about his personal safety, refused to move out.²

The year 915 marked the apex of the Shu. Their relationship with the Later Liang in North China proceeded smoothly, the Dachanghe state in the south had been defeated thoroughly one year before, and more significantly, its war with the Qi directly to their north had ended with a tremendous victory marked by Shu's occupation of the Qin-Long region.

All these external successes, however, did not prevent the sowing of the seeds of internal crises. The ever strong-willed Wang Jian became more and more suspicious, hesitant and whimsical in his last years. His constant replacing of high officials at both the central and local levels did not prevent drastic power struggles between court factions. The political strife grew more complicated due to the selection of an heir and intervention from his harem. At the same time, the groundwork of the state was seriously shaken by the prevalent corruption among imperial clansmen, military nobles, and powerful eunuchs. After the throne was passed on to Wang Jian's inept successor, Wang Yan 王衍 (901–926, r. 918–925), who faced an intimidating challenge from the Later Tang, a newly unified dynasty in North China, the doom of the Shu empire was not hard to predict.

CRISES UNDER THE REIGN OF WANG JIAN

Since the founding of the Former Shu, a variety of internal problems had ceaselessly beset Wang Jian. The most volatile and dangerous among

these problems were the fierce power struggles between high officials, commanders, adopted sons and princes, a series of events complicated by a bloody incident triggered by the succession crisis. Though a talented man in military affairs, Wang Jian proved less capable of managing court politics. Even worse, the culture of corruption, nepotism, and favoritism in his court exacerbated the crisis. While in his early reign his unchallengeable authority and iron-handed policies had helped Wang Jian maintain political stability, senility and illness in his last years left the once-proud ruler vulnerable to court intrigues.

The Power Structure and the Execution of Wang Zongji

The Former Shu gradually developed a relatively full-fledged set of political institutions and a large bureaucratic system. Understandably, as a polity originating from a former Tang military command, the Shu state, like most of the other regional powers of the day, originally relied on its provincial government as a source for recruiting new bureaucrats to staff the new imperial regime. Furthermore, the bureaucratic institutions of the Shu naturally emulated those of its political predecessor, the Tang dynasty. In 907, as soon as Wang Jian enthroned himself, the functioning bureaucracy of his professed “central” government was immediately filled by trusted aides: Wei Zhuang and Wang Zongji were made chief ministers; Wang Zongyu 王宗裕 and Zongkan, grand ministers (Taifu taibao 太傅太保); Tang Daoxi 唐道襲 (d. 913), commissioner of military affairs; Zhang Ge and Wang Kai, grand academicians; Zhou Xiang, chief executive of Chengdu (Chengdu yin 成都尹); and Yan Zunmei, chief eunuch of the inner court, etc.³ These appointments clearly reflected the major groups within the political power structure of the Shu: Wang Jian’s trusted adopted sons, his Xuzhou compatriots, able literati and former Tang officials, and a number of favored attendants.

Famed literati, especially prestigious former Tang officials, constituted a significant political group at the Shu court. Helping Wang Jian establish formal imperial institutions and manage daily governmental affairs, these men usually occupied a large number of senior offices, including

two of the most important positions, chief minister and commissioner of military affairs. The military commands, no doubt, were exclusively assigned to the emperor's adopted sons, especially those trusted ones from the Zhongwu Army, who tightly controlled imperial armies at both the central and local levels. A military group also occupied most of the leading positions in regional commands and prefectures. Meanwhile, a number of Wang Jian's favored attendants also played a very crucial role at the Shu court. Due to the complicated origins and backgrounds of these ruling elites, increasingly intense conflicts within the power structure were unavoidable.⁴ For example, when Zhang Ge was promoted to be chief minister, he "purged those whose abilities exceeded his through assorted intrigues" (有勝己者必以計去之).⁵ Those different groups contending for office and power at the Shu court, as Feng Juan describes them, were like performers climbing up a high pole, "endlessly striving to cater to the emperor through exaggerated techniques as they vied voraciously for largess" (常將險藝悅君目，終日貪心媚君祿).⁶

Initially, Wang Jian largely ignored the power struggle among courtiers. Understandably, the newly enthroned emperor was more concerned about strengthening his absolute authority in both the central and local administrations. The responsibilities of chief ministers were divided, shared and supplemented by other officials, such as academicians and the commissioner of military affairs. For example, the grand academicians acquired indirect executive and legislative powers and were frequently promoted to chief minister. Their status at the Shu court, though not as lofty as in later times, like the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644), was still very remarkable, as shown by the career of Zhang Ge.⁷ At the local level, a strategy to "divide and control" was adopted. More commands with smaller sizes and fewer economic and military resources were established. Provincial governors as well as the prefects were transferred frequently to guarantee that regional administrators could not augment their personal influence and challenge the "central" government in Chengdu. Throughout Wang Jian's reign, such a mechanism proved to be very effective, and not a single military rebellion led by provincial governors is reported.⁸ On this point, Wang Jian's Shu regime excelled compared

to its northern counterparts, which were harassed by frequent challenges from subordinate regional commands. But a downside to these policies existed too. Under conditions of frequent transfers and power sharing, ambitious officials obviously found more chances to contend for higher positions at court and to purge members of rival groups.

The first influential bloody incident in Wang Jian's reign was directly related to the demotion of Wang Zongji, the eldest adopted son. Adopted in the late 870s, Zongji had achieved tremendous merit in his long military career as a follower of Wang Jian. During the time when Wang Jian's own children were still very young, the seasoned Zongji was probably the most trusted "son" on whom Wang Jian relied on his road to military dominance.⁹ It was no wonder that Zongji was appointed as palace secretary (Zhongshuling) in 907, taking the responsibility of chief minister along with Wei Zhuang, as soon as Wang Jian proclaimed the founding of the Shu empire. Yet the father's trust soon changed to suspicion when he learned that Zongji had taken advantage of his position to form a personal clique. The cautious emperor deemed such factionalism a potential threat to his authority. In the spring of 908, Wang Jian discharged Zongji from the ministership, instead of granting his son a high titular office as a face-saving gesture.¹⁰ Unfortunately, this did not prevent a final confrontation between the father and son.

Wang Jian's suspicions were confirmed a few months later, when a report came to him claiming that Zongji had trained a group of personal guards at home and secretly communicated with some dubious favorites. The father's doubt was further provoked by Zongji's memorial a few days later, in which the son asked to be appointed chief commander of the imperial armies. Zongji gave the following reason for such a petition: "At this time of adversity, when the Crown Prince Zongyi is still young, how can I allow modesty to prevent me from assuming this important duty" (時方艱難，宗懿沖幼，臣安敢持謙不當重事)?¹¹ Understandably, this request appeared insufferably presumptuous in the eyes of Wang Jian, whose surprise and anger can be imagined.

Tang Daoxi, the most favored attendant of the emperor, finally determined Zongji's doom. The son of a former Tang official on assignment

in Shu, Tang Daoxi joined Wang Jian's regime in his youth. Sources report that he was a good-looking young man, who rose to eminence as a celebrated dancer, implying that he might have served Wang Jian as a lover. Favored by the emperor, Tang took the significant office of commissioner of military affairs in 907 and influenced the next two appointments to the same post.¹² The seeds of enmity between Tang Daoxi and Zongji had been sown earlier. It is indicated that the haughty commander had always treated Tang with disdain, directly using the latter's personal name instead of his official title on many occasions. Such behavior was seen by the emperor, who might have already been suspicious, as a sign of rebellion. As the *New History of Five Dynasties* reports, Wang Jian once said to himself, "Zongji addressed my military commissioner by his personal name; isn't it a sign of impending rebellion" (宗吉以名呼我樞密使，欲反耶)?¹³

The opportunity for Tang Daoxi's revenge came when the emperor called him in for his opinion of Zongji's memorial. The foxy attendant pretended to extol Zongji's prestige and capability, deliberately intensifying Wang Jian's existing suspicion. This might explain the cold response of Wang Jian to Zongji's request to resume his military office at a feast on the day of the military parade of 908, as mentioned in chapter 4. The desperate son had no way out. In his last court audience, probably in late 908 or early 909, the "arrogant attitude" of Zongji finally enraged Wang Jian, who "could not contain his anger" (不堪其忿) and ordered the execution of his son on the spot.¹⁴

The execution of Zongji again proved Wang Jian's absolutist style and his tight control of power. Yet it also reflects the growing tension among Shu courtiers. Zongji's death was a grim harbinger of the intensifying power struggle at the Shu court. A few years later, after an even more bloody confrontation sapped the health and energy of the emperor, Wang Jian eventually succumbed to his anxiety-fraught court.

The Death of the Crown Prince

The selection of an heir was a perennial problem for founding emperors in Chinese dynastic history. In general, the selection of a capable crown

prince helped secure the prosperity of the imperial enterprise launched by the father. On the other hand, an inept heir might bring the state to an early doom. In many cases, the process of heir selection involved bloody contention among the aspirants and their supporters, as shown in the famous Xuanwu Gate 玄武門 Incident in the early Tang period.¹⁵ Wild internal struggles for succession became even more prevalent in both south and north China during the chaotic Five Dynasties period.¹⁶ As the founding emperor of the Former Shu, Wang Jian faced the same problem in his later years, which ended in palace struggles that weakened his health and ended the lives of his designated heir and of his favorite Tang Daoxi, ultimately leaving his empire in the hands of the unpromising Wang Yan.

The youth of the Shu princes constituted an insuperable problem for the succession. Wang Jian had eleven blood sons in total, perhaps all born after his move to Shu. In 907, when the Shu empire was founded, Zongyi 宗懿 (892–913, later known as Yuantan 元坦, then Yuanying), the second-eldest prince, was merely sixteen years old, an age definitely seen as “still youth” in the eyes of the eldest adopted son, Zongji.¹⁷ Before that time, Wang Jian had already adopted a large number of foster sons, all seasoned martial men, some only a few years younger than the emperor himself, such as Zongkan, Zongyao, and Zongbo.¹⁸ Understandably, Wang Jian had to rely on his adopted sons to command troops. He had good reason to worry about his own sons’ ability to control these highly experienced “brothers.”

The quality of the Shu princes was another problem. Born and raised during peaceful times, most of them were known to be spoiled, ignorant, incompetent, and wholly lacking in the fortitude, perseverance, and martial spirit of their father. Their frivolous lifestyle and incompetence were once mocked by Guanxiu in a poem written in 912, when the emperor led all his children to visit the master in his monastery:

錦衣鮮華手擎鵲，閑行氣貌多輕忽。
稼穡艱難總不知，五帝三皇是何物。

Dressing in splendid silk and holding game fowl,
The princes display inappropriate expressions and levities;

Besides having no idea of the hardships of planting,
They have never heard of the Five Emperors and Three Monarchs.¹⁹

However, the heir still needed to be chosen from this group, no matter how inexperienced or incompetent he might be. After all, there was no reason to consider adopted sons if imperial descendants existed. According to Chinese tradition, the eldest son was given the first priority to inherit the father's position. But Wang Jian's firstborn son, Zongren 宗仁, had been handicapped by disease since infancy and perhaps had died by this time.²⁰ So the second eldest son, Zongyi, was naturally selected as heir apparent in the summer of 908.²¹

Sources give contradictory accounts of Zongyi: ugly in appearance, suspicious by temperament, rash and irritable, but intelligent in reading and good at horsemanship and archery.²² It seemed that Wang Jian had high expectations of this son early on, and intentionally sought to cultivate him as successor. In the grand military parade of 908, the eighteen-year-old Zongyi assumed the responsibility of drilling imperial armies on behalf of the emperor.²³ A year later, after Zongji was executed, the crown prince was formally appointed as commander-in-chief (Pan Liu-jun zhuwei shi 判六軍諸衛事), and was even allowed to establish a personal guard and his own administrative headquarters staffed by worthy courtiers, including the Daoist master Du Guangting.²⁴ In 911, when Wang Jian went on expeditions, he twice left the prince in charge of state affairs.²⁵ Yet, perhaps to his father's disappointment, it is reported that Zongyi never talked to those able literati selected to counsel him, but enjoyed playing with musicians and his favorites instead. Nonetheless, Wang Jian endeavored to educate and transform his heir. In 912, when the Hanzhou portent, an inscription recording the names of a legendary royal Wang house, was reported to the court, Wang Jian ordered the Crown Prince's name changed to Yuanying in order to "obey Heaven's intent."²⁶ In the meantime, the emperor conferred an instruction upon his son, alluding to a child "born as a noble prince who does not understand the hardships of founding a state" (縱祿富貴，不知創業之艱難). He was reminding the youth to remember the responsibility as a future

emperor of the Shu empire. In the instruction, the father suggested that his son “respect officials with utmost sincerity and treat soldiers with compassion and trust” (赤心待群臣，恩信愛士卒), and warned him to “shun hunting tours and guard against alluring sensual amusements” (絕畋遊之娛，查聲色之禍).²⁷ Elsewhere Wang Jian admonished, “Only by systematically studying my actions is the preservation of empire possible” (一切學朕所為，則可以保國); further evidence of his hope and his concern.²⁸

Unfortunately, as Wang Jian feared, Yuanying had little capacity to “respect officials with utmost sincerity.” On the contrary, Yuanying’s relationship with high officials, civilian ministers and military commanders alike, was not harmonious. It is recounted that one day, when Yuanying was showing off his extraordinary archery skills in front of a group of courtiers, Mao Wenxi 毛文錫, then the grand academician, composed a poem to flatter the crown prince; yet this voluntary adulation did not win any rewarding words from the prickly Yuanying, who gibed at Mao and his colleagues, “Your petty men fear my divine arrows, don’t you” (窮措大畏此神箭否)?²⁹ It can be imagined that such humiliating words deeply hurt the feelings of Mao and further distanced the prince from the civilian courtiers. Yuanying’s relationship with Tang Daoxi was even worse, which finally doomed the prince, just as it had his adopted brother Zongji. On many occasions, the prince openly showed his disdain for his father’s obsequious minion. Many times Yuanying scolded and mocked Tang Daoxi, who went directly to Wang Jian for protection. In early 910, when both men engaged in mutual recrimination before the emperor, Wang Jian begrudgingly transferred Tang to a command far away from the capital, hoping distance would end the conflict. On the day when Tang Daoxi left Chengdu, Wang Jian even accompanied him to the suburb of the capital, where the emperor composed a touching farewell poem for his favored attendant.³⁰ No doubt such demonstrations of imperial favor for Tang Daoxi only generated more resentment in the heart of Yuanying. Tang’s transfer did not mitigate tensions, but merely postponed the confrontation between the son and the favorite.

In the spring of 913, Tang Daoxi was called back to Chengdu and resumed his previous office, commissioner of military affairs. Yuanying immediately went to his father and complained that Tang Daoxi did not deserve such an important post. Though a little irritated, Wang Jian decided to compromise, transferring Tang to another high post.³¹

The tension between Tang Daoxi and Yuanying finally developed into a bloody fight that summer. One day in late August, Yuanying invited all the high officials to a feast at his mansion, perhaps hoping to use the occasion to test their loyalty. Little did he expect that this feast would finally ignite the fuse of longstanding tensions. Three courtiers did not show up: Pan Qiao 潘峭, the current military commissioner, Mao Wenxi, and one of his “brothers,” Wang Zonghan 王宗翰. In the eyes of the suspicious Yuanying, their absence indicated that the three men might not stand on his side. Tang Daoxi presented himself, but soon left when he noticed the hostile gazes of the prince’s attendants. The next day, in the early morning, Yuanying went to Wang Jian to accuse Pan Qiao and Mao Wenxi of “alienating brothers”; both were immediately demoted by the angry emperor, who obviously regarded the solidarity of his “sons” as the most crucial factor to the empire’s stability. Yet Wang Jian’s trust in Yuanying was soon shaken by a subsequent audience with Tang Daoxi, who alleged that the prince was preparing for usurpation by using the feast as a trap to detain the commanders. The slander proved powerful, partly because centuries earlier, the founder of the Tang had been dethroned by his own son. The increasingly wary Wang Jian accepted Tang Daoxi’s insinuations and summoned troops to strengthen palace security.

The military transfer scared Yuanying, who decided to eliminate his enemies first. He sent his guards to arrest Pan Qiao and Mao Wenxi, and attacked Tang Daoxi with the brigades under the command of his own officers. The fight erupted at the very gates of the palace, where Tang Daoxi was injured and then killed. The disturbance finally concluded in the evening, after Yuanying’s troops were smashed by loyal imperial armies led by several adopted princes. Yuanying was murdered the next morning by guards. When the news reached Wang Jian, the old father, never having anticipated such a tragic ending, was consumed by grief.³²

This incident is another manifestation of the power struggle at the Shu court, which in the words of a high official, “was solely a function of the contest for power between the crown prince and Tang Daoxi” (太子與唐道襲爭權耳).³³ Yet it reflects the increasingly unstable state of domestic Shu politics and Wang Jian’s incapacity to deal with intense factional conflict among his courtiers. The loss of a son and a favored attendant demoralized the emperor, and further internal struggles, this time involving his harem, ensued.

The Harem and the New Selection of the Heir Apparent

The death of Yuanying doubtless brought to the court a new round of intense competition for the position of heir apparent. In the reselection process, an unprecedented united front among civilian ministers, powerful eunuchs, and Wang Jian’s favored consorts effectively influenced the final designation. In particular, the forces from the imperial harem played a decisive role.

Although Wang Jian might have had more consorts in his life, sources record only ten of them.³⁴ His formal wife, née Zhou, was also a Xuzhou native, who already had a son (Wang Zongfan 王宗範) before she remarried Wang Jian early in his military career. In 908 Wang Jian proclaimed Zhou as his empress. Having no child with the emperor, empress Zhou seems to have shown neither interest nor ambition in the struggle over the heir.³⁵ Another consort, née Zhang, was a native of Shu, a background perhaps shared by most of the other consorts of Wang Jian. As the mother of Yuanying, the former Crown Prince, she had a high status in Wang Jian’s harem and was conferred the title “precious concubine” (Guifei 貴妃) in 908. But, understandably, she soon lost any influence in the inner court after the shameful death of Yuanying.³⁶ The Xu 徐 sisters were Wang Jian’s favorite consorts. Hailing from the family of a local official in Chengdu, the two sisters, locally acclaimed for their beauty, were “assimilated into the harem” (納于後房) by Wang Jian after occupying the city. The elder sister gave birth to Wang Yan, the youngest prince and the second Shu ruler. But the lovely younger Xu was more renowned due to her sobriquet “Madam of the Flower Pistil” (Huarui

TABLE 3. Wang Jian's Children and Consorts.

<i>Wang Jian's Children</i>	<i>Their mothers/Wang Jian's consorts</i>
Zongren 宗仁	Consort Ma 馬
Zongyi 宗懿 (Yuantan 元坦, Yuanying 元膺)	Precious Concubine 貴妃, Zhang 張 (Consort Bai 白?)
Zong-ji 宗紀	?
Zonglu 宗輅	Consort Song 宋
Zongzhi 宗智 (宗獻?)	Consort Chen 陳
Zongshi 宗時 (宗特? 宗霸?)	Consort Chen
Zongjie 宗傑	Consort Qiao 喬
Zongding 宗鼎	Consort Chu 褚 (elder Xu 徐?)
Zongze 宗澤	Consort Chu
Zongping 宗平	Consort Chu
Zongyan 宗衍 (Wang Yan 王衍)	Precious Concubine 貴妃, elder Xu Concubine of De 德妃, younger Xu Consort Bai Empress Zhou 周
Princess Jinci 晉慈公主	?

Sources. The list is made mainly based on XWDS 63.791; ZZTJ 267.8704–5, 8727–9, 8737; STW 1.7b–8a; JJJ 5.1a, 4a and SGCQ 38.559–563.

Sources record ten consorts of Wang Jian, though only their family names are known. Among them, eight bore him children, including eleven sons and one daughter. The order of the names of the princes on the list is based on the XWDS, which is presumably their birth order (a different order can be found in SGCQ 38.563–7). It should be noted that the sources disagree on some issues, such as the names of Zongzhi and Zongshi, the mother of Zongyi, and the mother of Zongding. Here I add the different records within the parentheses that follow with a question mark, without providing detailed sources. Further discussion is made in this chapter. At the end of the list, Princess Jinci is added. Based on the writings of Du Guangting, such as “Putang zhu gongzhu wei huangdi xiulu zhaici” 普康諸公主為皇帝修籙齋詞 (GCJ 4.17) and “Shuzhou Meng Fuma jiuya xiaozhai qianba huanglu daochang ci” 蜀州孟駉馬就衙消災遷拔黃籙道場詞 (GCJ 5.25–6), one might conjecture that Wang Jian had more than one daughter. Unfortunately, no detailed information can be found.

furen 花蕊夫人).³⁷ Wang Jian seems to have trusted the Xu sisters more than other concubines, having allowed the two consorts exclusive access to him in his later years, when the aged, suspicious emperor was more

worried about his safety.³⁸ Taking advantage of their intimacy with the emperor, the Xu sisters successfully had the youngest prince, Wang Yan, named heir apparent.

The vacancy of the position of heir apparent would be filled sooner or later. Understandably, many officials at the court were eager to exploit the situation. However, taking a lesson from the tragic fate of Yuanying and his followers, many courtiers preferred to bide their time rather than move in the wrong direction. Most officials perhaps held the belief that Wang Jian's own inclinations would finally determine the selection. But in this they were wrong.

Wang Jian decided not to follow the conventional rule of birth order, but instead invoked the principle of selecting worthiness over seniority. Initially, two sons came under consideration: Zonglu 宗輅, who was believed by Wang Jian himself to greatly "resemble" his father; and Zongjie 宗傑, who was known for his intelligence. Yet a scheme designed by the Xu concubines totally changed the emperor's mind.

In order to tip the balance toward the youngest prince, the lightly regarded Wang Yan, their own kin, the Xu sisters skillfully formed a united front with senior officials and commanders, connecting the inner harem and the outer court. They first sent Tang Wenyi 唐文扆 (d. 918), their eunuch liaison, to bribe the chief minister Zhang Ge. Perhaps hoping to sustain his fortune in the future, Zhang acceded to the proposal, drafting a memorial which petitioned for the selection of Wang Yan as heir apparent. In the evening of that day, the minister paid visits to a group of senior officials and commanders, including those influential adopted sons like Wang Zongkan, claiming that he had just received a secret edict that encouraged them to support the youngest prince. Without hesitation, all the officials and generals signed their names and submitted the memorial to Wang Jian the next day. If the memorial surprised the emperor, who to that point had not given serious consideration to Wang Yan, an ensuing test finally convinced him. A physiognomist was invited to the palace and ordered by the emperor to prognosticate the destinies of the princes. To Wang Jian's surprise, Wang Yan was selected as the one possessing the most august physical features. Without

knowing that the physiognomist had already been bought off by the Xu sisters, the emperor hesitated, but finally submitted to the “consensus” of his courtiers and agreed to make Wang Yan his heir.³⁹ Yet Wang Jian’s doubt did not totally disappear. He once said to himself, “Naive, young and weak, how is the son possibly fit for the mission” (宗衍幼懦, 能堪其任乎)?⁴⁰

Wang Jian began to train the second heir, as he had previously done for the deceased Yuanying. The fourteen-year-old Wang Yan took charge of the imperial armies and formed his own administrative coterie. To help the heir buttress his own power in the future, Wang Jian even allowed the young prince to adopt military men as foster sons.⁴¹ But the new crown prince, who indulged in debauchery and liquor, was destined to disappoint his father. One day in early 918, when Wang Jian heard the clamor of games played by the young prince and his attendants, the old monarch sighed, “How can such a son preserve a legacy that I won through hundreds of wars” (吾百戰以立基業, 此輩其能守之乎)?⁴² Then the emperor laid plans to replace Wang Yan with another son. But in his last months Wang Jian lost control of palace affairs. He could not even dismiss the minister Zhang Ge, who had played a dishonest role in the selection of the heir, due to the protection of the Xu sisters. A month later, Prince Zongjie, the worthiest son in the eyes of Wang Jian, suddenly died. The emperor could not help suspecting the complicity of the Xu sisters in the young man’s death, but it was too late for the dying emperor to reverse his fateful decision.⁴³

Corrupt Bureaucracy

Bureaucratic corruption seems to have been universal during the Five Dynasties period.⁴⁴ Among the southern states, notorious for the depravity of royal clans and officials, the Former Shu could be seen as a typical example. The peace and stability within the domain under Wang Jian’s reign, the wealth of the Chengdu plain, and a lifestyle of luxury in Shu all contributed to the formation of systematic corruption among the ruling elite.⁴⁵

The military men of the Former Shu exhibited particularly predatory and greedy conduct at Wang Jian's court. After the conquest of Shu, perhaps all the generals believed they were due compensation for the hardships they had endured in the past. This view might have been shared by Wang Jian, too, for he generously rewarded his meritorious generals and privileged adopted sons with fertile lands and high offices, while tolerating their exploitation and corruption. The strict discipline enforced earlier in the 890s was gradually replaced by a policy of laxity that turned a blind eye to the military men's greed and debauchery so long as their action did not threaten Wang Jian's authority. For example, Zhang Qing, the former captain in charge of military discipline in post-conquest Chengdu, attempted to rape and murder a nun, only to escape punishment.⁴⁶ Such indulgent handling of military men shows that Wang Jian relaxed military discipline once he consolidated his power.

Cupidity constituted one of the most distinct characteristics of the martial men of Shu. As one contemporary historian observes, "Among the Shu generals, few do not covet wealth" (蜀之將帥，鮮不好貨).⁴⁷ Wang Zongyu, for example, was known to have "acquired" vast sums of silver during his tenure as the governor of East Chuan. He transported the cash to Chengdu to build luxurious mansions. Although sources do not cite the methods by which Zongyu obtained his wealth, it is certain that little came from his official emolument. The wealth of the other generals can often be traced to illicit deeds. Wang Zonghan, appointed prefect of Pengzhou, murdered a wealthy local landlord and seized the man's fertile lands and property in their entirety. Wang Zongshu, who allegedly coveted the crystal vase of a merchant but did not want to pay the high price, simply wrested the treasure from him by force.⁴⁸ Lower-level captains of Shu were no different. A general named Wei Chenggao 韋成皋 once planned to produce gold by using a secret alchemical recipe which, he later confessed, was obtained from an alchemist he had murdered.⁴⁹ Given this culture of avarice among Shu bureaucrats, it is no wonder that the same historian mentioned earlier lavishly praised a rare local official known to be upright and incorruptible.⁵⁰

With brutal and avaricious military men heading the local administration, local bureaucracy naturally proved tumultuous and inefficient. When Wang Jian appointed his adopted sons and military commanders to major administrative posts, he likely never imagined such problems. While these local generals were able to thwart invasions, they proved inept as administrators in times of peace. Sources provide rich evidence showing the increasing tensions between the military administrators and their subordinates, especially civil officials. One of Wang Jian's adopted sons, Wang Zongxian 王宗憲, was notorious for his brutality and exploitation. When his secretary Liu Yinci 劉隱辭 expostulated on some literary satire, the governor flew into a rage and nearly executed Liu. Most prefectural officials who provoked their military governors did not live to tell the story. Wang Zong'an 王宗黯, governor of the Zhenjiang Command, framed and murdered a county official who refused to offer bribes on the governor's birthday. When Wang Zonghan was in charge of Shannan West, he even killed his deputy governor because of the latter's remonstrance against his misdeeds. A parallel exists in the case of Wang Zongshou, known as a "worthy prince" (*xian wang* 賢王) among Wang Jian's adopted sons. He executed the meritorious Wang Xiancheng 王先成 out of envy after the latter repulsed assaults from Jingnan in 914.⁵¹ Wang Jian, however, was unperturbed by the brutality and corruption of the military commanders at the provincial level. Although the emperor is said to have shown "anger" over the undeserved death of Wang Xiancheng, there is no record of punishment or even admonition of the guilty Zongshou. Without disciplinary control over corrupt commanders, the villainies of a handful of greedy military men became more prevalent late in Wang Jian's reign.

As a result of the heightened corruption among Shu bureaucrats, extravagance became a typical characteristic of the ruling elite. Commanders and officials competed with each other for splendid houses, costly clothes, and luxurious banquets. A general named Zhao Xiongwu 趙雄武 was known for his extravagant daily meals, cooked by more than one dozen chefs. One of his favorite foods was a giant pancake, which won him the nickname, "Giant Cake Zhao" (Zhao Dabing 趙大餅).⁵²

Another general, Li Siyi 李思益, was fond of luxurious clothing; on one occasion, his costly garment prompted Wang Jian to remark, “The finery you wear must be very expensive; Is this to aggrandize our military institutions” (李思益一副衣裳，大有所費，是要為我光揚軍府)?⁵³ The emperor’s reprimand was conveyed convivially, exposing his slight admiration for the general’s extravagance.

The corruption of the Former Shu did not merely occur among courtiers. In many ways, Wang Jian himself set an example for his retainers, and to some degree he was responsible for the culture of corruption and debauchery. The rhetoric of “a benevolent throne” he utilized to bolster his legitimacy after founding the empire proved to be a temporary strategy. Later on, the emperor evinced an appetite for wealth and lust similar to that of his covetous commanders. One source appraises the emperor’s greedy nature, remarking that “Wang Jian was eager to extract [taxes], in spite of storehouses brimming with treasure” (建急於督責，雖倉廩充溢而聚斂不已).⁵⁴ As with most notorious emperors in Chinese history, sources contain many tales of Wang Jian’s lechery. According to one anecdote, Wang Jian summoned a beautiful concubine of Wei Zhuang to his inner court on the excuse of tutoring his ladies-in-waiting in poetry, but the lady was occupied by the emperor and never returned. Though the credibility of this story is not widely accepted by historians, infamous deeds of the sort likely did occur.⁵⁵ A historical work records a similar account of an incident that occurred between Wang Jian and another high official. One day when the emperor visited the residence of Pan Kang 潘炕 (d. 914), military commissioner at the time, he happened to encounter Pan’s concubine, a lady renowned for her beauty and literary talent. “No one in my quarters can match her” (朕宮中無如此人), the emperor said to Pan Kang, implying an interest in having the lady. When Pan tactfully declined to do the emperor this favor, he was warned by his younger brother Pan Qiao, who feared his elder brother would invite severe punishment for disobeying the imperial will.⁵⁶ Pan Kang did not offer his lady to the emperor and still retained Wang Jian’s favor, but the wise minister soon handed in his resignation and retired in 913.⁵⁷

A Dying Emperor

The years 917 and 918 were significant in the history of the Shu empire, which saw a series of momentous changes in both its interstate contacts and affairs at court. In 917, Wang Jian launched another large-scale campaign against the Qi, his last military mission, but cut the campaign short with no concrete gains. In the same year, he also changed the title of his empire to the Great Han, a designation which lasted less than one year before reversion to the original name, the Great Shu.⁵⁸ All signs hinted at the senility of the emperor, who on many occasions sorrowfully admitted this sad truth. In his final years, the once energetic and strong-willed monarch was tortured by debilitating illnesses. At that time, the major concern of the seventy-one-year-old Wang Jian was to maintain the continuity of his imperial enterprise by smoothly handing over the throne to his designated heir. His last energies were directed toward that goal. He rearranged government personnel, drastically reshuffling civil bureaucrats while conducting a bloody purge of select military commanders. His target was very clear—the powerful courtiers, especially “fellow provincials from Xuzhou” (*Xuzhou guren* 許州故人), whom he feared might not serve his heir obediently after he died.⁵⁹

Factional struggles among civilian courtiers of the Shu continued in the last years of Wang Jian’s life, a natural consequence of his policy to divide the power of ministers. The competition for imperial favor was even more intense in 917 between the two highest officials, Zhang Ge, one of the chief ministers, and Mao Wenxi, the Military Commissioner. Cliques formed around the two aspirants for power. Zhang Ge formed an alliance with the powerful eunuch Tang Wenyi, who, favored by the Xu sisters, played an influential role in both the inner court and the outer palace. Mao Wenxi established a close bond with another minister, Yu Chuansu 庾傳素, by marrying his daughter to the latter’s son. But Mao never anticipated that this marriage would bring a fatal end to his career. On the day of the wedding, in the summer of 917, Mao held the celebratory feast in the hall of the Shumiyuan 樞密院, the office of which he was in charge. Holding the marriage feast in the official space might afford Mao Wenxi an opportunity to display power and wealth. But Mao

made a silly mistake. It turned out that he had not petitioned the emperor earlier to approve his temporary use of the office. Although sources offer no explanation for this audacious act, some might speculate that Mao saw no need to bother the ailing emperor, or perhaps that in his eyes it was not a serious offence to use the office for his private purpose. But the events that followed proved that he had overestimated his standing at the court at this critical time. It is said that Wang Jian was surprised to hear music from the yard of the Shumi yuan. His attendant Tang Wenyi, skilled at igniting the rage of the fractious emperor, intentionally slandered his rivals. The affair resulted in a series of demotions and dismissals of many high officials, including Mao Wenxi, Yu Chuansu, and members of their families.⁶⁰

Though court factionalism troubled the aging Wang Jian, military commanders constituted an even greater problem. Having benefited greatly from the military during his career, Wang Jian fully appreciated the significance of the effective control of troops to the stability and continuity of his empire. He was deeply anxious about the ability of his heir, Wang Yan, to control those obstinate and unruly military men. Thus, Wang Jian sought to clear the road of obstacles to his successor. Whereas the killings of Hua Hong, Zongji and Zongxun in Wang Jian's early reign had served to consolidate his power, the execution of Liu Zhijun in 918 marked the emperor's last effort to prepare his son to take over the reins of state.

Among the surrendered generals in the Shu military, Liu Zhijun was perhaps the most capable one. Since his surrender in 915, Liu had been "treated magnanimously" (厚禮之) by Wang Jian, and had assumed the governorship while retaining command of troops.⁶¹ Apparently, both Liu's military talent and his experience in the Qi attracted the emperor, who soon used him against Li Maozhen. In the campaign the following year, Liu led troops to join the siege of Fengxiang.⁶² In the summer of 917, when Wang Jian started to arrange another campaign against Qi, Liu was again selected as one of the leading commanders in charge of military preparation and later was even given the title chief commissioner (Du Zhaotaoshi 都招討使), a top position in the expeditionary

army. But this appointment doomed him. As a turncoat, Liu obviously lacked either the credibility or the authority to command other Shu generals, especially Wang Jian's adopted sons and longtime followers, who "seldom obeyed his orders" (多不用其命). Moreover, Liu's sudden rise to high position naturally incurred the jealousy of other courtiers, such as Tang Wenyi, who slandered him many times in front of Wang Jian.⁶³ Around this time, a folk ballad was reported to the emperor: "If the black bull is free of [the] tether, the ropes (*zong sheng*) will be broken immediately" (黑牛無系絆，棕繩一時斷).⁶⁴ Perhaps deliberately created and circulated by Liu's political enemies, this ballad was interpreted negatively against him: Liu Zhijun, born in the year of ox, would persecute all the royal princes of Shu whose names contained "*Zong* 宗" and "*Cheng* 承" (a close approximation to "*sheng*"). This apocryphal ballad greatly increased the emperor's suspicion. One day, Wang Jian said to his attendants, "I am old now. If I die, none of you can control Zhijun. So it is better to remove him earlier." (吾老矣，吾且死，知俊非爾輩所能制，不如早圖之). In late 917, the emperor executed Liu Zhijun on charges of treason.⁶⁵

The change of personnel at court in early 918 was another of Wang Jian's preparations for the transfer of power. Wang Zongkan replaced the dead Liu Zhijun as the chief commander of the expeditionary army on the Shu-Qi border. Inside the capital, Chengdu, another adopted son, Wang Zongbi, was appointed chief commissioner in charge of both the cavalry and infantry units.⁶⁶ Perhaps Wang Jian had noticed the clique of Zhang Ge and Tang Wenyi, and he attempted to use his own trusted adopted sons to counterbalance the influence of the alliance between a minister, a powerful eunuch and his own concubines. But, admittedly, the dying emperor could do little about it, as shown by his helplessness in addressing the suspicious death of prince Zongjie. By this time, protracted illness had seriously worsened Wang Jian's health, which was soon further undermined by severe diarrhea.⁶⁷

On June 14, Wang Jian summoned all his senior courtiers to his inner chamber and delivered his political will on his deathbed, expressing

again his worry about his weak successor and the potential intervention of the Xu family. He left the following edict:

太子仁弱，朕不能違諸公之請，逾次而立之。若其不堪大業，可置諸別宮，幸勿殺之。但王氏子弟，諸公擇而輔之。徐妃兄弟止可優其祿位，慎勿使之掌兵預政，以全其宗族。

The heir apparent is weak, he whom I installed by breaking the order of seniority, as you requested. If he proves incapable of managing the great enterprise, you officials can transfer him to another palace, but please let him live. Then you can select another successor from the other princes of the Wang house to assist. The brothers of concubine Xu can only be given high honorary positions, but never allowed to command troops or intervene in government. This is the way to preserve their family.⁶⁸

Obviously, his testament in some way authorized courtiers to reselect a successor if Wang Yan “proved incapable of managing the great enterprise,” words that threatened the status of the heir and his supporters. This explains the incident that followed. Tang Wenyi, in charge of palace guards, ordered all palace gates closed that night, attempting to prevent a further meeting between the dying emperor and his courtiers. When this scheme was disclosed, Wang Zongbi and his fellows broke into the inner court and reported it to Wang Jian. Then the emperor made his last change of court personnel, deposing Tang Wenyi and members of his clan before assigning all civil and military affairs to two other officials, Yu Ningji 庾凝績 and Song Guangsi 宋光嗣. At the same time, four of his adopted sons, Zongbi, Zongyao, Zongwan 宗綰, and Zongkui 宗夔, were called upon to “aid the rule” (*fu zheng* 輔政) of his successor. Such an arrangement reflects Wang Jian’s intention to design a brand new power structure for the sake of his successor. On the one hand, he tried to rely on his adopted sons to help Wang Yan in his rule, but he also needed to take precautions against the disobedience of those martial men. By putting the eunuch Song Guangsi at the top of the military administration and later making him military commissioner, Wang Jian

likely hoped to enable his heir to exert tight control over the military.⁶⁹ This replacement of one powerful eunuch with another did not correct the problem of factionalism at court, but rather created a more powerful and corrupt eunuch group, which hastened the collapse of the empire.

The last days of Wang Jian witnessed a series of strange phenomena in the Shu lands, which naturally were seen by both the emperor and his attendants as bad omens. First, local officials reported that the plants on the Emei Mountain 峨眉山 were widely covered by snow-white blossoms. Then people heard wild foxes howling around the palace. And a flock of vultures hovered around the Longyue Pond in the imperial city.⁷⁰ The dying Wang Jian became more superstitious and nervous. When an attendant composed a delicate poem about the vultures, he was immediately chided by Wang Jian, who obviously had inferred an ominous meaning.⁷¹ It is said that the emperor was awakened many times by dreams of the haunting image of the dead Liu Zhijun. The terrified Wang Jian ordered the general's buried bones exhumed, shattered, and dumped into the Shu River 蜀江.⁷² Wang Jian's attitude infected his courtiers. When some local prefects offered white eagles and rabbits as auspicious signs to the court, those senior ministers decided to keep only the rabbits but return the eagles, for the reason that eagles prey on rabbits, and the emperor happened to be born in the year of rabbit.⁷³ But all the efforts were too late to save the emperor. On July 11, Wang Jian closed his eyes forever, finally leaving his empire behind. A few months later, Wang Jian's coffin was moved to his grand mausoleum with the designation of "Eternal" (Yongling 永陵).⁷⁴

THE REIGN OF WANG YAN, 918–925

The day after Wang Jian passed away, the heir apparent, Wang Yan, then eighteen years old, succeeded to the throne, starting his seven-year rule over the Shu empire.⁷⁵ Under the reign of Wang Yan, factionalism and court corruption grew more rampant. More seriously, the once-powerful Shu military continued to degenerate, exposing the state to the increasing threat of the Later Tang, the newly rising power in the Central Plains. As Wang Jian had feared, the second Shu ruler proved too incompetent

FIGURE 6. Mausoleum of Wang Jian.

and weak to maintain the mandate in this multistate period. In 925, these internal crises and external dangers combined to doom the Great Shu empire.

Power Structure at the New Court

After the accession of Wang Yan, the Shu court underwent a new round of power distribution among competing political groups. Although Wang Jian's adopted sons and his Xuzhou compatriots remained major power brokers, they inevitably encountered challenges from new faces, who enjoyed greater favor from the new throne. Such a change only intensified factional strife.

The most conspicuous change at the Shu court was the sudden rise of the eunuch group represented by Song Guangsi. Initially appointed by

FIGURE 7. Elegiac Edict for Wang Jian.



the late Wang Jian as military commissioner, Song Guangsi soon consolidated his power and obtained the trust of the young emperor, who authorized the eunuch to command the imperial armies and all other military units. The demoted, former, eunuch leader, Tang Wenyi, possibly viewed

by Song Guangsi as a potential threat, was sentenced to death.⁷⁶ The meteoric ascent of Song Guangsi can also be seen in his dominance over the other courtiers. When an official satirized the powerful eunuch in a poem, he was immediately discharged and demoted to a distant border district.⁷⁷ Even ministers like Wang Kai and Yu Chuansu, in the words of the source, “dared not look [Song Guangsi] in the eye” (不敢正視) when talking to the eunuch, a sign of deference as much as fear.⁷⁸ In the summer of 918, Wang Yan appointed a number of favored eunuchs as military commissioners, including Song Guangsi’s cousin, a measure that greatly expanded the influence of the group.⁷⁹ Thus, the young emperor fundamentally altered the previous balance of power among senior officials, which was a deliberate way of controlling power during Wang Jian’s reign by ensuring that no single group became too dominant.

Changes also occurred in the composition of the body of civilian officials, though factional struggle never ceased. With the downfall of Tang Wenyi, his political allies, headed by Zhang Ge, fell to ensuing purges. A few days after Tang Wenyi’s execution, Zhang Ge, the minister who had contributed so much to Wang Yan’s succession, was demoted to a northern prefecture, where he was put under the surveillance of local officials.⁸⁰ In the case of Zhang Ge, sources mention only the role of the then-current minister Yu Ningji, who, as a cousin of Yu Chuansu, took the opportunity to avenge his relatives who had been purged by Zhang one year before. But Zhang’s demotion might also have been desired by the young emperor and the Xu sisters, who presumably did not want the former minister to disclose their conspiracy.

In this process, the literati active in Wang Jian’s reign were gradually replaced by a new cluster of officials. Some talented literati retreated from the political stage, and a new group of less able men, represented by Han Zhao 韓昭 (d. 925), emerged at court. Though possessing no actual literary talent, Han Zhao is said to have been familiar with music, chess, and calligraphy, and he had a skill in flattery that soon brought great imperial favor his way. He was first appointed chief executive of Chengdu and later promoted to the position of grand academician of culture and thought hall (Wensi dian Daxueshi 文思殿大學士).⁸¹ His rise at

the Shu court seems also to have been related to the favor of Wang Yan's aunt, the Lady of the Pistil, who reputedly maintained a sexual relationship with the sycophantic Han Zhao. This anecdote might be true, since Han Zhao was permitted to enter the inner court freely.⁸²

The Xu sisters now exerted a dominant influence over the Shu court. On the same day that Wang Yan ascended the throne, the elder Xu was elevated to empress dowager (Taihou 太后) and the younger Xu to consort dowager (Taifei 太妃).⁸³ Such promotions seemed proper considering the accession of their son and nephew, respectively, but coincided curiously with the death of empress Zhou, Wang Jian's primary wife, who "died only a few days after Wang Jian" (後建數日而卒).⁸⁴ Under this circumstance, empress Zhou's death is very suspicious. The Xu family hence obtained even greater power. In 921, with the help of the empress dowager, a girl from the Xu family, a cousin of Wang Yan, was "incorporated" into the harem and installed as his concubine. In the outer court, two brothers of the dowagers obtained high positions; one was even appointed chief commander of the imperial armies. Pan Zaiying 潘在迎, whose wife was also from the Xu family, became a trusted attendant of the emperor.⁸⁵ At the newly constituted court, Wang Jian's deathbed warning against the Xu family no longer had any impact whatsoever.

Admittedly, a cluster of adopted sons and the Xuzhou compatriots still wielded power, but their influence diminished as the new political elite took control of the court. In 920, Zhou Xiang was sent to serve as governor of a small province on the southern border.⁸⁶ Zhou's transfer can be seen as a sign of the decline of the Xuzhou group.

Wang Jian's adopted sons fared no better. In the summer that Wang Yan came to power, he granted the title of prince to eight of his father's adopted sons, including the four who had received Wang Jian's deathbed edict to aid the young emperor. But Wang Yan's appointment of Song Guangsi to the post of commander-in-chief made manifest the young emperor's intent to curb the power of his "brothers." Under such circumstances, competition between the new power groups and the old dignitaries was inevitable. Understandably, the deep-rooted influence of the

adopted sons in the army afforded those martial men a temporary advantage. In the fall of 918, merely three months after Song Guangsi had assumed the top military position, the eunuch had to “petition” to transfer the office to Wang Zongbi, and Wang Yan could only lend his consent.⁸⁷ After that, the tense conflict between the military men and Wang Yan’s favored attendants continued. In the process, the young emperor’s interest in literature gradually reversed Wang Jian’s previous policy of military favoritism, and the change proved fatal to a regional regime under military threat from the north.

A Reversed Civil-Military Relation

Unlike his martial father, Wang Jian, Wang Yan inherited the throne in a peaceful environment and enjoyed literary compositions over military affairs. Such a transition in the Shu leadership from a martial monarch to a literate ruler further weakened the military foundation of Shu and intensified the existing conflict between *wen* and *wu*.⁸⁸

Sources detail Wang Yan’s gift for letters. One source reports that he “was capable of drafting literary essays since childhood, talented and thoughtful, and especially good at composing refined musical lyrics” (自童年即能屬文，甚有才思，尤能為豔歌). While the collection of his compositions, *Collection of Fireworks* (*Yanhua ji* 煙花集) is not extant today, the information preserved in later bibliographical works indicates that it included more than two hundred poems, most of which had been “widely circulated among the Shu people” (蜀人皆傳誦焉) during his time.⁸⁹ His talent in literature seemed to have been known by contemporaries beyond Shu, as evidenced in a tomb inscription from 927, which compared the man in the tomb in Henan to Wang Yan in literary talent.⁹⁰

It is reasonable to believe that Wang Yan’s interest in literature was mainly cultivated under the influence of the Xu sisters, both known to “possess literary talents” (有藻思).⁹¹ It seems likely that Wang Yan’s aunt, the Lady of the Pistil, exerted the greatest influence on the young man. Her famous collection of boudoir poetry, entitled *Huarui furen*

gongci 花蕊夫人宮詞, vividly reveals the inner court life in Wang Yan's reign.⁹² Sources also record several poems composed by the emperor and the two dowagers during imperial tours, occasions the emperor utilized to inspire new poems and exchange writings with his mother and aunt.⁹³

Wang Yan's great passion for lyrical composition might invite us to incorporate gender as a category when thinking of the power transition of the Shu empire. Gender has been employed in political history recently to discuss male kings and their preoccupation with symbols of masculinity and femininity.⁹⁴ Spoiled since early youth by the Xu sisters, Wang Yan lacked the masculine conditioning of his older brother Yuanying. The popular style of lyrics in the Shu area in the first half of the tenth century, as represented by the famous school of Huajian 花間 (Among the Flowers), continued the trend since Tang times of an expression of "male androgyny," with literati writing in a feminine voice.⁹⁵ This mimicry of the feminine is clearly seen in Wang Yan's extant compositions. As one reads:

畫羅裙，能結束，稱腰身，柳眉桃臉不勝春，薄媚足精神，
可惜許，淪落在風塵。

The lotus skirt in painting,
Fits the lady's slim waist if knotted.
The willow-leaf-like eyebrows and the peach-like face,
Though not enduring the spring, are still lovely and charming.
What a pity since they happen in this human world!⁹⁶

Besides his skill at composing such lyrics in the feminine style, Wang Yan is also said to have often joined his waiting ladies at palace banquets, holding musical instruments to sing delicate songs customarily performed by females.⁹⁷ His effeminacy was also evidenced in his interest in wearing make-up along with his concubines: a face-painting known as "drunken style" (*zui zhuang* 醉妝) soon became popular in his realm.⁹⁸ He fell just short of a transvestite in his fanatical excesses.

The lack of masculinity in the new leadership of the Shu doubtless hastened the deterioration of its military establishment, which had already been in decay due to the long period of peace. Wang Yan's control over

the military proved ineffective throughout his reign. In the first year of his reign, he approved the voluntary resignations of his brothers as military commissioners. They had been appointed by Wang Jian earlier to counterbalance the power of the adopted sons.⁹⁹ Perhaps in the eyes of Wang Yan, it was much safer to separate former contenders for the throne from the military. However, Wang Yan had no ability to command troops himself. In 919, three military commissioners ignored the imperial order that proscribed absence without leave, but the emperor indulged them without punishment, setting a bad example for the armies. The effect was disastrous; as a source reports, “Since then, none of his orders were obeyed” (自是禁令不行).¹⁰⁰

While Wang Yan aspired to some military feats like his father’s, he achieved only pale comic mimicry of Wang Jian’s martial achievement. In many of his tours around Shu, the young emperor is said to “have frequently donned military uniform” (頻做戎裝), even carrying a bow and arrows in front of his people.¹⁰¹ In 921, Wang Yan selected a special test title, “Which policy should we adopt to pacify the Central Plains” (以何策可以定中原), for the students taking the civil examination that year, an act designed to showcase his claims to martial ambition.¹⁰² In the fall of the last year of his reign, the emperor insisted on traveling north; in his words, “Such an inspection was not for fun, but for border security” (驅馳非取樂, 按幸為憂邊). On the road to the northern border, the emperor wrote, “My illustrious predecessor had expanded the borders with divinely martial armies” (先朝神武力開邊), in celebration of the heroic merits of his father.¹⁰³ The young emperor did launch a real military campaign. Dreaming of imitating his father by achieving some military victories, Wang Yan started a war against the neighboring Qi. Yet sources do not record any achievements, implying that the Shu armies likely gained no advantage under Wang Yan’s command.¹⁰⁴

The once formidable Shu armies now faced serious problems. Many capable commanders had passed away or retired due to old age. The second generation of commanders, much like Wang Yan, had experienced a similar degeneration of fitness for combat and could hardly match their capable fathers.¹⁰⁵ The relationship between the whimsical

ruler and his generals also lacked harmony. By one account, Wang Yan once attempted to abduct a general's daughter, and this improper act enraged the man, Zhou Yanzhang 周彥章, who later joined others in murdering Wang Yan's favored attendants on the eve of the downfall of Shu.¹⁰⁶ Another general, Wang Hui 王暉, even planned to assassinate the emperor, though no detailed reason is provided by the sources.¹⁰⁷ In 925, Wang Yan promoted his uncle Xu Yanqiong, the elder brother of his mother, to a position of oversight over imperial armies in the metropolitan area, which had been assumed earlier by Wang Zongbi. This replacement further provoked the Shu generals, who regarded it as "unfair" (*bu ping* 不平).¹⁰⁸ In the same year, Wang Yan established a new military unit named the "Longwu Army 龍武軍," commanded by one of his favored eunuchs. It received more provisions and higher ranks than all of the other Shu forces, which further alienated his commanders, "all of whom felt indignant and ashamed" (無不憤恥).¹⁰⁹ Doubtless, these policies combined to sow the seeds of defeat a few months later, when the state was invaded. Yet the young emperor of Shu still continued enjoying his extravagant court life, wholly oblivious to the deadly crisis within his regime and the looming threat from outside.

Always Chasing Flowers and Willows: The Last Lord

In traditional Chinese historiography the last emperor of a falling dynasty is usually depicted as a sybarite whose corruption and lack of interest in government affairs leads to the loss of his mandate. The standard posthumous epithet for such rulers, "Last Lord" (Houzhu 後主), has been applied to the last rulers of the Shu-Han, the Chen 陳 (557–589), and a number of southern regimes conquered by the Song during the tenth century. Although the traditional moral judgments of official histories in explaining the fall of a regime have been challenged recently,¹¹⁰ moral decay and corruption, as evidenced in the Former Shu and other southern states of the day, cannot be ignored in explaining their collapse. Admittedly, leadership deficiencies existed among second-generation successors of all the ruling houses of regimes in the Five Dynasties

period, particularly in the southern states.¹¹¹ During the transition from a martially intimidating founder to a second-generation ruler who “directs rather than leads the military” and “governs by institutions rather than charisma,” the last lords of the southern regimes seem to have been compromised by their relatively safe and wealthy southern environment.¹¹²

Wang Yan, who “enjoyed riches and honors since birth and inherited the realm without exerting much effort” (生當富貴，坐得乾坤), was no doubt such a last lord.¹¹³ Nearly all sources provide detailed accounts of the ruler’s extreme extravagance, which, though possibly exaggerated by his conquerors and later historians, is clearly more than fabrication. After coming to power, Wang Yan ordered a new palace garden to be built named “Spreading Glory” (Xuanhua yuan 宣華苑), which, a source reports, was “extremely extravagant” (窮極奢巧).¹¹⁴ The yards were paved with expensive, exotic sandalwood, pools were filled with perfume, gardens were decorated by rare flowers transplanted from North China hundreds of miles away. The young emperor once established a “hill” with tons of fancy textiles in the new garden, on which he drank and enjoyed music with his consorts and attendants day in and day out.¹¹⁵ A Song historian once characterized the ruler with these words, “[Wang Yan] only cared about palaces and gardens, only enjoyed banquets and tours, only favored sycophant attendants, and only indulged in sensual pleasures” (惟宮苑是務，惟宴遊是好，惟僉巧是近，惟聲色是尚).¹¹⁶ Such a judgment is supported by Wang Yan’s own writing:

這邊走，那邊走，只是尋花柳。那邊走，這邊走，莫厭金樽酒。

Either this way or that way,
I only chase flowers and willows;
Either that way or this way,
I would never tire of the liquor in the gold cup.¹¹⁷

In another poem, he expressed the same hedonistic philosophy, “At such a beautiful time when the water-like moonlight fills the palace, only an

idiot would not get drunk in the presence of wine” (月華如水浸宮殿，有酒不醉真癡人).¹¹⁸

Wang Yan also is known for his lasciviousness. Upon his enthronement, Wang Yan ordered twenty beauties to be selected to “fill his harem” (備後宮). A year later, more women were recruited for the inner court from upstanding families in Chengdu, a job entrusted to his commissioner of the imperial workshop for music (Jiaofangshi 教坊使).¹¹⁹ Wang Yan is also known to have visited the brothels around the capital city in secret many times. In order to conceal his identity, the emperor ordered the citizens to wear large-brimmed hats, a special style he used to cover his face on secret tours.¹²⁰ The emperor’s sensual indulgence generated a series of misdeeds, inevitably provoking both the Shu people and his officials. On an imperial tour, Wang Yan physically seized a local woman, resulting in the suicide of her fiancé.¹²¹ Besides the aforementioned attempt to abduct the daughter of the general, Wang Yan seized the daughter of one of his own adopted sons, a military officer who was later demoted for overtly expressing dissatisfaction.¹²²

The atmosphere of corruption at court extended to the royal family. The Xu sisters took advantage of their special position to reap riches. Besides managing profitable businesses in various cities, the greedy dowagers even turned profits by selling official positions.¹²³ Their close relatives earned the same opportunities to make personal profits. Xu Yanqiong 徐延瓊, brother of the Xu sisters and uncle of the emperor, built a splendid mansion in Chengdu, a construction so extravagant it even astonished Wang Yan. But the emperor never criticized the imperial uncle; instead, he encouraged all the members of the royal house to visit the amazing building.¹²⁴

With the corrupt example set by the ruler himself, the decay of the Shu bureaucracy is not hard to imagine. At this time, government affairs were dominated mainly by Wang Yan’s favored attendants and eunuchs. This group, as vividly depicted in an essay composed by a contemporary Shu official, included four eunuchs (Song Guangsi, Jing Runcheng 景潤澄, Ouyang Huang 歐陽晃 and Tian Luchou 田魯儔), three attendants (Han Zhao, Gu Zaixun 顧在詢, Yan Xu 嚴旭) and two imperial

relatives (Xu Yanqiong and Pan Zaiying). This author of this essay, titled “Composition for the Ten Figures” (“Shizai wen” 十在文), also added Wang Zongbi to the list, condemning him for cupidity and irresponsibility.¹²⁵ Manipulated by this entrenched interest group, the government of Shu could seldom incorporate any new, capable literati into the bureaucracy, as Wang Jian did in his reign. In 921, when the Shu held a civil examination to select officials, Han Zhao, the supervisor in charge of the selection, took bribes and put many of his relatives in important positions. When the emperor, upon hearing accusations from examinees, attempted to investigate the corruption, Han Zhao explained that those selected actually belonged to the Xu family. Thereupon Wang Yan “maintained silence” (*mo ran* 默然), never inquiring into the issue again.¹²⁶ A contemporary once described the court under Wang Yan thus: “All the senior officials are evil like thieves and bandits, and all local administrators are as rapacious as wolves and tigers. Large numbers of crafty sycophants occupy the court, where their greed and corruption are akin to that of marketers” (衣朱紫者皆盜蹠之輩，在郡縣者悉狼虎之人奸諛滿朝，貪淫如市).¹²⁷

Of course, not all Shu officials tolerated the prevailing decadence, but the voices of those who did not were weak and powerless. Some candid civilian officials like Liu Zuan 劉纂 warned the emperor that “the foundation of the state is eroded, just like a drunk man unable to stand straight” (邦基頹然，如人之醉而不可支).¹²⁸ Other righteous officials attempting to advise Wang Yan believed an indirect way to be more acceptable. Liu Zan 劉贊 submitted a painting depicting the story of the Last Lord of Chen and composed a poem at the same time to remind Wang Yan of the historical lesson of the short-lived dynasty that had fallen three and a half centuries ago.¹²⁹ The same method was adopted by Song Guangpu 宋光溥, an upright eunuch, who once recited a Tang poem on the demise of the Sui dynasty at a palace banquet. Such warnings, however, failed to engage the attention of Wang Yan. Upon hearing Song Guangpu’s recital, the emperor showed his discontent visibly, ending the banquet immediately.¹³⁰ The dire situation worried some of the adopted princes, too. Weeping at a palace feast, Wang Zongshou

exhorted the emperor to “think more of the state” (以社稷為念), but his emotional plea was overtly derided by Wang Yan and his toadying attendants.¹³¹ Another senior commander, Wang Zongchou 王宗儔, even planned to depose the inept emperor, but the plan was soon aborted when he failed to secure cooperation from Wang Zongbi, the chief commander of the Shu army, a man apparently only concerned with his personal gain.¹³² In these circumstances, the officials who remonstrated often paid dearly for their courage. At the suggestion of Jing Runcheng, Wang Yan demoted an official who explained the appearance of a comet as a sign of the impending fall of the Shu.¹³³ Pan Zaiying even advised Wang Yan to execute anyone who dared to speak out.¹³⁴ Obviously, those interest groups who enjoyed imperial favor saw any remonstrance as a challenge to their status.

Social control was also strengthened in the late reign of Wang Yan. A special patrolling unit was established to monitor officials and citizens. Its members, secretly called “dogs” by the Shu people, took responsibility for spying on any popular agitation.¹³⁵ Social resentment still permeated the Shu realm. A revolt launched by a regional governor broke out in Jinzhou in early 920, followed by a local peasant rebellion several years later in East Chuan.¹³⁶ These signs portended the impending fall of the Shu. One prescient Shu official warned the emperor, “If both the emperor and courtiers indulge in pleasures without worrying about state affairs, I am afraid that such a situation will cause the northern enemies to conspire against us” (君臣沈湎，不憂國政，臣恐啟北敵之謀).¹³⁷ Obviously the biggest northern enemy of the Shu was the Later Tang, which by this time had emerged as a superpower in North China.

SHU-LATER TANG RELATIONS AND THE FALL OF THE SHU

As the Shu empire experienced progressive internal decay and decline, corresponding changes occurred in its relations with its rivals and the balance of power rapidly tilted away from the Shu. The fatal danger came not from Yunnan, Jingnan, and the Qi, Shu’s immediate neighbors, but from

the distant Central Plains. The Jin, one of the former allies of the Shu in the late ninth and early tenth centuries, had gradually gained momentum under their gifted leader, Li Cunxu, in their struggle against the Later Liang. With their final conquest of the Liang in 923, the Jin gained hegemony over North China and took the name of Later Tang. This totally altered the old balance of power that the Shu had relied upon to survive. The changing relations between the Shu and the Later Tang can be divided into three phases: the recovery of contact prior to 923; diplomatic exchanges as equals from 923 to 925; and the final conquest of Shu by the northern power. The Shu began on an equal footing with the Later Tang, but had to assume a lower rank when confronted by the latter's prowess. In the end, the Shu essentially forfeited its "shared" Mandate of Heaven.

The relationship between the Shu and the Jin had been established earlier, in the late ninth century, when Wang Jian and Li Keyong, both self-claimed Tang loyalists, formed a military alliance against Zhu Wen's Liang. But the relations between the two allies deteriorated soon after 907 and might have been totally severed after 912. As Wang Jian assumed the title of emperor and restored diplomatic relations with the Liang in 912, there was no political or military purpose to continuing his friendship with the Jin, who had suffered serious setbacks under the Liang's attacks. Furthermore, perhaps in the eyes of Wang Jian there was no personal reason for him to keep a relationship with the Jin after Li Keyong died in 908; the new Jin leader, Li Cunxu, was too young to become a serious rival. This policy toward the Jin was apparently maintained throughout Wang Jian's reign and continued in the early reign of Wang Yan, with the Liang remaining the "fraternal ally" of Shu.

Yet with the noticeable changes in the political environment in North China around 920, the suspended relations between the Shu and the Jin started to warm up. After seizing Hebei, a strategic area where the Liang had exerted a strong influence before, the Jin army continued bloody campaigns against Liang forces stationed along the Yellow River in Henan and Shandong. In 918, Li Cunxu organized a grand military parade at his new power center in Hebei to review his allied troops, which were increased by nearly all the surrounding independent commands.

Obviously the Jin had won the support of those influential Hebei powers by that time. Over the next few years, Li Cunxu took advantage of the internal power struggles at the Yiwu 義武 and Chengde 成德 Commands in central Hebei, successfully establishing direct control over the two regions. At roughly the same time, Jin troops under the direct command of Li twice repulsed Kitan invasions along the northern borders. As the Jin rapidly emerged as a formidable power, the Liang suffered a series of crises in military and political leadership. In 920, a powerful Liang governor of Hezhong surrendered to the Jin. This incident was followed by the dismissal of a capable military commander, who was murdered the next year by Modi, the suspicious Liang emperor. It is evident that although the two sides held a temporary standoff along the Yellow River in the early 920s, the promising Jin had clearly gained momentum.¹³⁸ It was under these circumstances that Shu resumed relations with its former ally, the Jin.

Perhaps foreseeing the ultimate victory of the Jin, Wang Yan began restoring diplomatic relations with the long-neglected power. Although sources provide no information about Shu's relationship with the Liang at this time, it is likely that their conventional political contacts were suspended when Wang Yan decided to realign with the Jin. In the spring of 921, Wang Yan wrote to Li Cunxu multiple times, urging him to accede as emperor.¹³⁹ Apparently Wang Yan adopted the same strategy as his father, who had once tried to persuade the late Li Keyong to assume the same title a decade earlier. It should be pointed out that the political goals of the two Shu rulers were different: as mentioned earlier, Wang Jian's request in 907 was designed to reduce resistance to his enthronement, but for Wang Yan the suggestion was a pragmatic display of Shu support for Jin hegemony in the Central Plains. Wang Yan shared one goal with his father, that is, his communication reflected Shu acknowledgement of the Jin as a political equal. The meaning behind the suggestion is clear: Li Cunxu's accession would help to make the two regimes equal in name and in reality.

The formal diplomatic contacts between the Shu and the Jin as two states with equal status were not initiated until 923, when Li Cunxu,

after acceding to the throne, finally destroyed the Later Liang and established the Later Tang as the only super power in North China.¹⁴⁰ Power draws allies, and the Later Tang's victory radically altered the political balance that had favored the Shu in the past decades. Two of its neighboring rivals, Li Maozhen of the Qi and Gao Jichang of Jingnan, soon announced their allegiance to the new "central" power.¹⁴¹ Even though the Shu court might have anticipated such an outcome, both Wang Yan and his courtiers were still shocked by the swiftness with which an emissary of Li Cunxu, now emperor Zhuangzong, arrived at Chengdu to "announce his victory" (*gaojie* 告捷) in that year.¹⁴²

Wang Yan immediately dispatched an emissary to Luoyang, the new capital of the Later Tang, to deliver his congratulations. In this first formal diplomatic contact since Zhuangzong's enthronement, Wang Yan set the tone of exchange by stressing their equality. He wrote in the name of the "monarch of Great Shu" (*Da Shu guozhu* 大蜀國主), addressing Zhuangzong as the "emperor of Great Tang" (*Da Tang huangdi* 大唐皇帝).¹⁴³ In avoiding the term "*huangdi*" (emperor) when referring to himself Wang Yan seems diplomatically humble, but in juxtaposing the "Great Shu" against "Great Tang," he demonstrated a steadfast insistence on an equal position in dealing with the Later Tang. On the same mission, Shu envoys warned the Tang elite of the dangerous terrain of Shu, obviously attempting to strengthen the image of the Shu as a power too tough to fight, especially for the horsebound Shatuo.¹⁴⁴ It is apparent that notwithstanding Zhuangzong's great reunification of North China, the Shu still endeavored to develop an equal relationship, expecting to "share" the Mandate of Heaven with the new northern dynasty as it had with the Liang. At this point, it resembled the Wu in the Yangzi region and the Southern Han in Lingnan in terms of diplomatic rhetoric, but it had far surpassed the other regional regimes that nominally "submitted" to Tang sovereignty.¹⁴⁵

To be sure, the strategy of the Shu in their first diplomatic contact did not dissipate Zhuangzong's ambition, which was only aroused by the defiant words in the letter from Shu. According to the *Old History of Five Dynasties*, Zhuangzong "was unable to tolerate" (不能容) the rhetoric

contained in the Shu letter.¹⁴⁶ Sources inform us that the Later Tang emperor had already planned to “employ military means” (*yongbing* 用兵) to conquer a disobedient Shu long before its envoys arrived.¹⁴⁷ Yet preceding an actual military move were a series of exchanges of diplomatic envoys, by which means the two sides pursued different political and military goals. This process of Shu-Tang diplomatic contacts in 924–925 provides us a chance to examine closely the changes in the diplomatic rhetoric, which vividly reveals corresponding changes in the respective strengths of the two powers, their attitudes toward each other, and their perceptions of themselves in the changing political environment.

As a response to Shu envoys, Zhuangzong dispatched Li Yan 李嚴 (d. 927) to Chengdu in the early summer of 924.¹⁴⁸ Known for his intellect and eloquence, Li Yan served as more than a mere messenger. His mission included disseminating the Later Tang’s new authority and collecting information about the Shu regime. In his first palace audience with the Shu emperor, Li Yan presented a speech in which he first touted Zhuangzong’s military feats in the reunification of Central Plains, and then continued,

今則秦庭貢表，兩浙稱臣，淮南陳負拜之儀，回紇備朝天之禮。。。。。。。豈謂大蜀皇帝，柔遠懷邇，居安慮危，喜我帝祚中興，群妖悉滅，特遣蘇張之士，來追唐蜀之歡。。。。。臣則叨承元造，獲奉皇華，載馳得面于天顏。。。。。

Nowadays, the Qin court (Qi) offers fealty [to the Tang], the two Circuits of Zhe (Wu Yue) submit as our subject, Huainan (Wu) conducts protocols of submission [with the Tang court], and Huihe prepares to pay homage to [the dynasty]...As for Shu, the emperor of Great Shu has attracted the people from afar and pacified those nearby, confronted dangers while living in peace. Your majesty was glad to know that my master had restored the Tang and destroyed the old evil, sending esteemed diplomats to reinvent the previous good relationship between Tang and Shu...Taking advantage of the restoration of Tang, I received the imperial order to visit Shu; It is such a great honor for me, a subject, to have the chance to meet Your Majesty in person...¹⁴⁹

Li Yan's speech was designed to aggrandize his master's feats and announce the unalterable sovereignty of the Later Tang. As described by the *Zizhi tongjian*, the northern envoy "highly praised Zhuangzong's extraordinary virtues and martial power" (嚴盛稱帝威德) before the assembled Shu courtiers.¹⁵⁰ But from the words cited above, it is certain that the Later Tang government still regarded the Shu regime as a diplomatic equal. Wang Yan was referred to in this formal diplomatic speech as "emperor" (*huangdi*), the same designation used by Zhuangzong. Furthermore, and more importantly, when referring to himself, the Tang envoy humbly used the term "*chen*臣" (subject), the same manner used when speaking to his own monarch. This kind of rhetoric clearly demonstrates that the Later Tang acknowledged the legitimacy of Shu, an empire sharing heaven's mandate with itself.

Li Yan's first diplomatic visit to Shu was highly successful. It seems that his speech moved both the Shu ruler and most of his officials, who "admired Li Yan's astonishing eloquence" (咸伏其雄).¹⁵¹ Wang Yan treated Li Yan very respectfully, entertaining the envoy extravagantly with palace dancing and evening banquets. Moreover, the Shu emperor accompanied Li Yan on a pilgrimage to the Shangqing Daoist Temple 上清宮, where the former Tang monarchs were all enshrined.¹⁵² By showing the Tang envoy that Shu shared reverence for the former Tang, Wang Yan's intent was very clear: there should be no conflict between the Shu and the Later Tang, and the two states needed to develop an equal and friendly relationship.

Ironically, Li Yan interpreted the hospitality of the Shu ruler as a sign of weakness. After his return to the north, the Tang emissary eagerly recommended that Zhuangzong consider the conquest of Shu, a regime he described as ruled by "a self-indulgent and irresponsible" (*huangzong* 荒縱) ruler, whose officials were "obsequious and greedy" (諂諛專恣). The Tang emperor "agreed strongly with him" (深然之).¹⁵³ Indeed, the vulnerable yet wealthy regime that promised easy conquest held great appeal for an ambitious monarch like Li Cunxu. By one account, another objective of Li Yan was to purchase Shu treasures for the Tang palace. But Shu law explicitly forbade the export of indigenous rare objects,

and thus the Tang envoy could only return with less valuable commodities that were considered by the Shu people “mere commodities from the local bazaar” (*ru cao wu* 入草物). Failure to procure these treasures irked the vainglorious Zhuangzong, who flew into a fury and vituperated, “Why should Wang Yan escape relegation to the same market [that he invokes]” (王衍寧免為入草之人耶)? “His determination to conquer Shu was thereby sharpened” (伐蜀之意銳矣), one source reports.¹⁵⁴

Admittedly, Li Yan’s visit aroused the suspicions of some Shu officials’ about a potential threat from the north. The very day Li Yan delivered his speech at court, Wang Zongchou, riled by the envoy’s insinuated condemnation of Shu’s refusal to resist the fall of the former Tang, petitioned to execute the guest on the spot. Song Guangbao 宋光葆, a senior eunuch, clearly spoke out about the upcoming danger the Shu faced from the north: “The Prince of Jin has an intent to invade our state” (晉王有憑陵我國家之志). Song even proposed a set of counter-moves to resist what he saw as a probable three-pronged military strike by the Later Tang. To the east, an expanded navy should be sent along the river to guard against Jingnan, whose governor Gao Jichang had just paid homage to Luoyang. To the northeast, where the Shu and the Later Tang shared a border, the Shu needed to station troops to detect invasions from the other side. In the north, where the Shudao was located, a much more active move was proposed: sending a large force to attack the Qi, in hopes of seizing the strategic region to create a buffer between Shu and the Central Plains. Meanwhile, he proposed that Shu form an alliance with the Kitan, enticing the powerful regime to attack the Later Tang from its rear.¹⁵⁵

Although Wang Yan desired a peaceful relationship with the Later Tang, Song Guangbao’s arguments swayed the tractable emperor. He agreed to take some precautions against the northerners. Song Guangbao was appointed governor of East Chuan, supervising defenses on the eastern side. In the summer of 924, two commanders were assigned to strengthen the defense in the north, one on the frontier against the Qi, the other at the strategic Lizhou, gateway to the Chengdu plain. Meanwhile, a capable general was sent to the eastern borders to reinforce the

navy in the gorges areas.¹⁵⁶ Yet not all of Song Guangbao's measures were implemented, especially the aggressive, potentially more effective, recommendation concerning the north. The Shu emperor displayed his conservatism and timidity.

Warfare, however, did not break out right away. Diplomacy continued to be used by both sides, helping each regime present its position at its rival's court and in a practical way. In the summer of 924, a Shu mission headed by Ouyang Bin 歐陽彬 arrived in Luoyang as a "return mission" for the Li Yan visit. The state letter Ouyang submitted conformed to a format applied to "peer rivals states" (*diguo* 敵國), starting with the words, "The emperor of Great Shu addresses the emperor of Great Tang" (大蜀皇帝上書大唐皇帝), which, again, emphasized the equal position of both rulers.¹⁵⁷ Apparently, Zhuangzong acquiesced to, though he was probably disgruntled with, Shu's claim of equal status. One month later, after receiving the Shu legation, Zhuangzong dispatched Li Yanchou 李彥稠 to Chengdu to "continue good relations" (*tong hao* 通好).¹⁵⁸ Perhaps the Tang emperor had not made a final decision to invade Shu at this time, or perhaps he was just attempting to hide his real plans before launching a surprise assault.

Wang Yan and his courtiers insisted on maintaining an equal status in diplomatic exchanges, hoping to avoid direct military conflict with the powerful Later Tang. In the winter of 924, the Shu court sent out a third diplomatic mission, again headed by the experienced Ouyang Bin, to ease Shu-Tang tensions. Ouyang's official title in this mission, "Tang commissioner of amicable relations" (Tangguo tonghaoshi 唐國通好使), clearly demonstrates the conciliatory attitude of the Shu side.¹⁵⁹ Sources do not provide information about Ouyang Bin's activities in Luoyang and Zhuangzong's treatment of the Shu envoy. But from the ensuing reaction on the Shu side, Ouyang's mission must have been very "successful," at least in the eyes of the Shu decision-makers. As a Shu official described it a few months later, "[Tang and Shu] just expressed mutual good will, frequently exchanging letters and gifts" (方申歡好, 信幣交馳).¹⁶⁰ Wang Yan seemed more satisfied with the result of this diplomatic exchange, believing that there would be no need to prepare

for a Later Tang invasion. Thus, Shu troops deployed along the northern borders were summoned back to Chengdu.¹⁶¹ But subsequent events revealed that Zhuangzong had deliberately used diplomacy to lull the Shu court into a false sense of security: his decision to invade had already been made. Wang Yan's gullibility cost him dearly.

Zhuangzong dispatched Li Yan to Shu a second time in the early summer of 925, just a few months before he proclaimed the war of conquest.¹⁶² It was the last time Zhuangzong employed diplomatic means for political and military purposes. The tactful diplomat not only collected useful information for the subsequent campaign, but he also reasserted Zhuangzong's lofty dream of unification. His meeting with Shu courtiers vividly demonstrates the subtle changes in their perceptions of the strength of their respective states. In a banquet hosted by Song Guangsi, Li Yan got a chance to show his pride as an imperial envoy from a "superior" power, announcing that the Later Tang would "repay submission with virtue and recalcitrance with military attack. [In so doing], before long the whole world will be under one sovereign and the great unification achieved" (順則涵之以恩澤，逆則問之以干戈，四海車書，大同非晚). Issuing a subtle challenge to the Tang envoy's boast, Song Guangsi expressed two concerns about Zhuangzong's sovereignty in North China. First, he claimed to be suspicious of the loyalty of the Qi to the Later Tang in order to discredit Zhuangzong's claims of universal power. Then the eunuch inquired about the rising power of the Kitan, anticipating that the nomad regime might threaten the security of Tang from its north. In this battlefield with no smoke or gunpowder, Li Yan fought back with his eloquent wit, stressing the formidable military forces at Zhuangzong's disposal. The Shu eunuch likely never anticipated that Zhuangzong would later exploit this superficially cordial debate at the banquet as an excuse to invade.¹⁶³ By that time, the Later Tang's invasion was just a matter of time.

While the Later Tang actively prepared its war of conquest against Shu, the Shu court still had no idea of the real intentions of its northern rival. Admittedly, the Shu ruler was aware that his empire had lost the prestige it had held under his redoubtable father. By one account, at a

TABLE 4. Envoys Exchanges between the Former Shu and the Later Tang.

Year/month	Tang envoys to Shu	Shu envoys to Tang
923/10	Yang Yanxun 楊彥詢	
924/1		Ouyang Bin 歐陽彬 and Gu Xiong 顧復
924/4	Li Yan 李嚴	
924/7		Ouyang Bin
924/8	Li Yanchou 李彥稠	
924/11		Ouyang Bin
925/4	Li Yan	

Sources. As mentioned in chapter 6, the records of the diplomatic exchanges between Shu and Later Tang vary greatly among sources. No single source records all the missions given here. A detailed discussion about my treatment of different records has been provided in the notes of chapter 6. Here I list only the sources on which each entry is based: Yang Yanxun (ZZTJ 272.8903; XWDS 47.523; JWDS 90.1187); Ouyang Bin's first mission (JWDS 136.1820, 31.426; CFYG 232.19a; JJJ 1.2a); Li Yan's first mission (ZZTJ 273.8918, 8921; XWDS 63.792–3; JJJ 1.2a); Ouyang Bin's second mission (JWDS 32.438. Zhuang-zong's *Shilu* quoted in TJKY, see ZZTJ 273.8921, 8926–7); Li Yanchou (ZZTJ 273.8924; STW 1.17a); Ouyang Bin's third mission (*Shu shu*, quoted in TJKY, see ZZTJ 273.8921; JLQJZ 6.7b); Li Yan's second mission is based on XWDS 26.283; STW 1.18b; JLQJZ 6.7b; JWDS 33.454.

palace banquet one day in the early summer of 925, the Shu emperor was in a visibly bad mood. When asked by an attendant, Wang Yan gave the reason for his vexation, “There is Later Tang to the north and barbarians in the south. I am not capable of conquering them, nor able to make them my subjects. This is why I worry” (北有後唐，南有蠻詔，朕既不能吊伐，彼又不為臣子，此所以憂爾).¹⁶⁴ But his anxiety did not linger: Wang Yan foolishly believed he would continue to share the “Mandate of Heaven” with the Later Tang. The frequent exchange of envoys between Luoyang and Chengdu during the year greatly dissipated his worries. In the late fall of that year, Wang Yan, accompanied by his mother and aunt, visited Mount Qingcheng, performing Daoist rituals to improve the fortunes of the regime, composing assorted poems along the way.¹⁶⁵ They were unaware that during their return journey in

early October, the Tang expeditionary armies had just departed Luoyang and were headed for Shu by way of Qi.¹⁶⁶

The irresponsibility of Wang Yan was also shown in his willful sojourn to Qinzhou, where his favored attendant Wang Chengxiu 王承休 served as governor. Relying on his beautiful wife, with whom Wang Yan had a longstanding affair, Wang Chengxiu enjoyed a special measure of imperial favor. At his attendant's behest, Wang Yan built the Longwu Army and appointed Wang Chengxiu as head. Once appointed Qinzhou's governor, Wang Chengxiu built extravagant palaces and collected exotic flowers and beautiful women for the emperor, enticing Wang Yan to journey there. Perhaps because the news of the Tang invasion had reached Chengdu, many Shu courtiers tried to dissuade Wang Yan from launching the long journey. But the obstinate Wang Yan insisted, claiming that his journey to Qinzhou was actually to "pacify the battlefield on the border" (用安疆場), an act following both the ancient sage kings and his martial father.¹⁶⁷ When the Shu emperor had just departed Chengdu in late October, an emergency military report arrived from the border, verifying the invasion of the Later Tang. Wang Yan still did not believe the information, boasting that "I am just hoping to display the military might of Shu" (吾方欲耀武).¹⁶⁸ Then the imperial procession moved north to Lizhou, where Wang Yan finally realized the imminent danger when he encountered defeated Shu troops retreating from the northern front. He hastily fled back to Chengdu in panic, issuing a series of orders to organize military defenses along the Shudao. Wang Zongbi was left to guard the strategic Lizhou, and three of his adopted brothers were sent to resist Tang troops along the Shudao north of Lizhou. But these preparations came too late.

The Later Tang expeditionary armies moved swiftly. Entering Shu territory from the southwest of Qi, Tang troops easily occupied Fengzhou with little resistance, then heading directly for Lizhou. On the Shu side, neither troops nor commanders had interest in fighting for the unworthy emperor. Shu troops sent to resist Tang forces refused to fight, deriding their military supervisors overtly, "Why not rally those Longwu soldiers to fight" (請喚取龍武軍相戰)?¹⁶⁹ The corrupt Shu court finally had to face the bitter fruit of Wang Yan's flagrant political and military

mismanagement. Provincial governors, including several royal brothers, surrendered to Tang armies, one after another, with their prefectures and their armies.¹⁷⁰ The last plank supporting the Shu empire was removed by its own chief commander, Wang Zongbi, who retreated from Lizhou to Chengdu without launching a single defensive action. He even volunteered to join the Tang vanguard, occupying the Shu palaces and taking the royal family into custody.¹⁷¹ The Great Shu thus crumbled, in short order.

On the heels of victory, the rhetoric of Tang communications with the defeated Shu radically changed. In Zhuangzong's "Proclamation of War against Shu" ("Fa Shu zhao" 伐蜀詔), dated September 30, 925, the emperor of the Later Tang addressed Wang Yan as "Shu zhu 蜀主" (Lord of Shu), accusing the Wang house of "betraying Tang favor over two generations" (世負唐恩) and "illicitly seizing the land of Shu" (盜據劍南之土宇). By claiming Wang Yan's "usurpation of the royal title" (*jian hao* 僭號), Zhuangzong abandoned the rhetoric of equality employed in earlier diplomatic exchanges with Shu.¹⁷² This tone was further strengthened in an ordinance of Li Jiji 李繼岌, son of Zhuangzong and chief commander of the expeditionary army, who described the Later Tang as a righteous, superior state whose mission was to destroy the Shu, the "embodiment of evil" (*can yao* 殘妖). He reviled the Shu regime as "illegitimate" (*wei*) much like the Later Liang, "as giant bandits who encroached upon Heaven's Mandate for forty years" (窺吾大寶, 為四十年之巨寇).¹⁷³ On November 30, when Li Jiji arrived at Lizhou, he forwarded to the Shu court an imperial edict "conferred" (*ci* 賜) by the Tang emperor, a word acknowledging Wang Yan as a vassal.¹⁷⁴ Because victory was almost in hand, Zhuangzong softened his rhetoric, aiming to persuade the defeated occupant of the Shu throne to give up resistance and surrender with some face: "The region of Shu was originally an integral part of our Tang empire" (蜀部封疆本是我唐境土), which was "accordingly occupied" (遂茲割據) by Wang Jian during a time of crisis, "after the illegitimate Liang had murdered the emperor and usurped the empire" (當偽梁篡弑之時). Thus it was time for the Shu to "return" (*gui* 歸) to the Tang because Zhuangzong had restored the empire.¹⁷⁵

For the Shu court, the outcome of the war left no option but submission. On December 8, when the vanguard of the Tang armies had crossed the Lutou Pass, Wang Yan sent a letter to Li Jiji, asking for permission to “submit to the orthodox government” (*guiming* 歸命). Along with the letter was a box holding the heads of Song Guangsi and three other eunuchs, the Shu ruler having imputed to them responsibility for military resistance to the Tang.¹⁷⁶ A formal memorial of submission was subsequently submitted, which reads:

臣先人受鉞坤維，作藩唐室，一開土宇，垂四十年。屬梁室
挺災，皇綱解紐，不能助逆，遂至從權。。。。。。皇帝陛
下，嗣唐虞之業，興湯武之師，廓定中區，奄征下國。。
。。今則委千里封疆，盡為王土。。。。。。

It has been forty years since my father, a regional governor of [the] Tang, was bestowed the power to rule the land and established the realm. Back when the Liang rampaged and imperial rule waned, he had to take the expedient way [to ascend to throne], refusing to submit to the evil Liang. ... Your majesty inherits the enterprise of sage kings Yao and Shun, organizes righteous armies to pacify the Central Plains, and launches a punitive expedition against my petty regime.... Now all the Shu lands for a thousand miles become part of the imperial realm....¹⁷⁷

The former relationship of Wang Yan and Li Cunxu, as a pair of rulers sharing the mandate of a single age, now changed to that of a subject and a ruler. In entering the date at the end of the memorial, Wang Yan deliberately omitted his reign title. The Shu empire no longer functioned in reality or in symbol.

The final ritual of submission proceeded on December 15. Accompanied by a full cohort of Shu courtiers to meet the conquerors, Wang Yan assumed plain clothes, a rope on his neck, a jade disk in his mouth and a coffin to his rear, kneeling on the Sima Bridge 駟馬橋 north of Chengdu, precisely the place where his father, Wang Jian, had received the submission of Tian Lingzi and Chen Jingxuan about three decades before.¹⁷⁸ Tang troops entered Chengdu city as victors the next day. From

the day its armies departed Luoyang to the occupation of the Shu capital, only seventy days had elapsed.¹⁷⁹

The communication between Zhuangzong and the deposed Wang Yan, now a Tang subject, continued after the Shu collapse. Zhuangzong promised to treat Wang Yan compassionately as a submissive regional lord, assuring the captive with the words, “Having already relinquished your territory to us, I promise no risk to human life. Swearing on the sun, moon, and stars above, I make no misrepresentations” (固當裂土而封，必不薄人於險，三辰在上，一言不欺).¹⁸⁰ Showing his gratitude as a Tang subject, Wang Yan responded with a memorial to Zhuangzong: “Though losing my state, I am so glad to submit to a dynasty that embodies the Way; despite separation from home, I feel grateful to be alive in the age of great peace” (雖亡家國，喜歸有道之朝，縱別鄉園，幸在太平之化).¹⁸¹ On the second day after the Chinese new year, February 16, 926 by the western calendar, Wang Yan “gladly took to the road” (忻然就道), departing from Chengdu with his entire family and a large entourage of Shu officials. Three months later, the entire royal family of Shu was executed in the suburbs of Chang’an at the command of the Tang court.¹⁸²

CONCLUSION

爭霸圖王事總非，中原失統可傷悲。往來賓主如郵傳，勝負干戈似棋局。

It is always futile to take on hegemons in aspiring to sovereignty,
Despite the lamentable loss of legitimate monarchs in the Central
Plains.

Lords and subjects come and go like postmen passing through;
The outcome of war seems as [unpredictable] as a chess game.

—Zhan Dunren 詹敦仁 (914–979), “Quan Wangshi rugong”
勸王氏入貢¹

On a sunny day in the spring of 933, a group of high-ranking civil officials and military commanders chatted leisurely over an extravagant banquet in the Garden of Spreading Glory, the lush imperial garden built by Wang Yan, the Last Lord of the Former Shu. Perhaps because such an occasion so vividly resembled many similar scenes under the inept former monarch, the subject naturally turned to the swift demise of the Former Shu empire. Meng Zhixiang 孟知祥 (874–934, r. 934), then the potentate of Chengdu, concluded the conversation: “If Wang Yan cared

about state affairs and solicited the aid of worthy men, how could Jiji possibly conquer [the Shu]" (使衍不荒於政，有賢臣輔之，繼笈小子豈能遽取耶)?² The ambition conveyed by the words of the rising ruler became obvious as he portrayed himself as a capable leader eager to found another empire on the lands of the Former Shu and challenge the supremacy of the Later Tang in the Central Plains.

Indeed, this was exactly the path that Meng Zhixiang pursued after he was appointed governor of West Chuan, soon after the fall of the Former Shu. In the political chaos following the Later Tang conquest, Meng Zhixiang soon established his authority in Chengdu, where a political vacuum was left by the deposal of Wang Yan and the return of Prince Jiji. Soon after Mingzong purged Zhuangzong as emperor of the Later Tang in North China, Meng started to defy imperial orders from the north and reestablish the lost autonomy of Shu. Relying on a formidable army, which he built by conflating defeated Shu troops with remnants of the Later Tang expeditionary army, Meng Zhixiang successfully foiled the military counterstrike by Mingzong in 931, and even annexed East Chuan in the following year. In early 933, Mingzong conferred upon him the title of King of Shu, and acquiesced in his request to appoint local officials, signaling that the northern court had accepted the *de facto* independence of Shu. Finally, in the beginning of 934, just a few months after Mingzong died, Meng Zhixiang, a military man hailing from the north, founded his own "Great Shu" empire (known as the Later Shu) on the same territory as the Former Shu.³ That summer, the Shu emperor sent envoys to Luoyang, the capital of the Later Tang, to announce his accession, with a letter beginning with the salutation, "the Emperor of Great Shu submits this correspondence to the Emperor of Great Tang" (大蜀皇帝獻書于大唐皇帝).⁴ Clearly, Meng Zhixiang faithfully followed Wang Jian in achieving military success, pursuing imperial ambition, and sharing Heaven's Mandate with a northern dynasty.

The legacy of Wang Jian's Former Shu was critical to the Later Shu and contributes to our understanding today of the national politics and power relations within the multistate structures of the Five Dynasties period. Wang Jian rose to power from obscurity in the chaotic late Tang

to establish an empire in Shu in 907, the same year that the Later Liang, the first of the “Five Dynasties,” was founded in North China. Depending on a powerful military, the strategic location of the Shu area, and astute diplomatic tactics in dealing with surrounding powers, the Former Shu under Wang Jian’s rule successfully challenged the hegemonies of the most powerful regimes of the day from its base in the southwest. It was recognized as a political equal and treated as such by a succession of northern powers, with whom the Former Shu shared the Mandate of Heaven both in reality and in rhetoric. As the Former Shu’s achievements clearly show, the widely accepted predominance of the northern dynasties over other states during the Five Dynasties period does not reflect political reality, at least in the early tenth century, when no single power possessed the capability of destroying its rivals and dominating the entire country. In this light, the traditional view of the Five Dynasties, in which the legitimate dynasties all resided in the north and the south contained only illegitimate states, should be understood as a historiographical construction, obviously derived from the Song dynasty, which itself emanated from the north.

The political history of the Former Shu, with both its achievements during the reign of Wang Jian and its failure under Wang Yan, reveals the importance of assorted balances of power to the regional regimes of the tenth century. Under the balance of power system formed among the various empires, kingdoms, and other autonomous polities, most rulers of the day preferred to adopt practical strategies in dealing with their neighbors to maximize their own self-interest, not only by means of military alliance and hostile confrontation but also through diplomatic contacts and envoy exchanges. Participating in the creation of the balance of power in China proper during the early tenth century, Wang Jian wisely developed different relationships with various powers at different times, including the Later Liang, Jin, Qi and Jingnan, based on his calculation of the strength of Shu and his practical needs within the contemporary power structure. The pragmatism of Wang Jian in taking advantage of and maintaining the existing balance of power, as seen in his exploiting Qi as a buffer zone and preserving Jingnan, worked very well to promote

the survival and growth of the Former Shu, especially in its negotiation with the powerful Liang as a political equal. Later changes in the power relations around the area generated significant consequences, especially as the original balance of power was upset. In the 920s, when the Later Tang replaced the Liang as the dominant power in the Central Plains, the Former Shu, under the inept Wang Yan, only briefly maintained its original status as an equal recognized by the northern dynasty before it collapsed.

From a micro-scale perspective, the case of the Former Shu offers a good opportunity to investigate some other distinguishing characteristics of the regional regimes of the Five Dynasties during the transitional period from the late Tang to the early Song. As demonstrated by Wang Jian's founding of the Shu empire, military force was a critical factor in the formation of a regional regime in the turbulent late Tang. The formidable military of Shu was indispensable in maintaining the balance-of-power system, in which the Former Shu negotiated with its rivals and, in its heyday, succeeded in challenging the northern dynasties. Not surprisingly, the decay of the military under Wang Yan accelerated the fall of Former Shu, as the Later Tang emerged to alter the original balance of power. The military factor, however, is not sufficient to explain the nature of the regional regimes of the Five Dynasties. As shown in Wang Jian's case, various normative strategies replaced martial force as means for a ruler to legitimize his authority. After 907, when the Former Shu achieved safety and peace on its borders, military means were quickly supplemented by, and then supplanted with, more constructive forms of eliciting compliance by Wang Jian, who was then an emperor, to justify his imperium. By employing a series of legitimizing strategies—recruiting civil officials, developing the local economy, patronizing Buddhism and Daoism, and invoking cultural symbols—Wang Jian strove to transform himself from a warlord in the late Tang to an emperor in the multistate period of the Five Dynasties. Of all his legitimation tactics, showing his respect to the former Tang dynasty proved the most efficacious. As a former military governor of the Tang, Wang Jian fully realized the importance of the Tang cause both to his legitimacy in Shu

and to diplomatic negotiations with his rivals, to which ends he never ceased endeavoring to maintain a loyal image and positioning himself as a political successor to the former dynasty.

However, the military separation and lingering reverence for the Tang did not become obstacles to the historical transition from Tang to Song. “In a larger scheme of periodization,” as a scholar has pointed out, “disunion stands out as a catalyst of the social transformation” and “[t]raditions of local independence, previously depreciated as disruptions of the dynastic cycle, assume a more positive significance in this perspective.”⁵ In a historical perspective, the division of the period can be understood as symptomatic of great changes, changes that included not only destruction of the old but also reconstruction and creation of the new. The economic, cultural, and social developments of the southern states doubtless contributed to the development of south China, in contrast to the north, during the period.⁶ Even political consolidations in their respective domains, as the example of Former Shu proves, helped maintain regional integrity that in turn made future consolidation on a larger scale more likely to succeed. In this sense, the southern states, like the five northern dynasties, were moving toward regional consolidation and development in the tenth century, paving the road to the later transition during Song times. Thus, although I disapprove of understanding the Five Dynasties as leading inevitably to a “Song reunification,” this study is not aimed at denying changes in post-Tang China, a world with not only inheritance and continuity but also dynamic forces that helped build a new era.

The experience of the Former Shu, especially its distinctive manner of dealing with rivals, which has been characterized in this study as pragmatically “sharing the Mandate of Heaven” within a balance of power system, was not merely limited to the regional regimes of the early Five Dynasties. Such a political configuration provides insight into the power dynamic of the multistate period that followed. As mentioned earlier, the legacy of Wang Jian was carried on by the Later Shu. When the Later Tang toppled in North China, the Later Shu continued its imperial authority and soon obtained official recognition as a political equal from the new dynasty in the Central Plains, the Later Jin. In late spring

of 937, Meng Chang 孟昶 (919–956, r. 934–964), heir of Meng Zhixiang, received a letter from Shi Jingtang 石敬瑭 (892–942, r. 936–942), emperor of Jin, which began with the salutation, “the Emperor of Great Jin petitions to the Emperor of Great Shu” (大晉皇帝奏書大蜀皇帝).⁷ The agreement to “share the Mandate of Heaven” was clearly established between the two emperors. Afterward, the diplomatic exchanges as equals between the Later Shu and the northern dynasties continued for two decades, even into the late 950s, when Shu lost its momentum under the attack of the powerful Later Zhou. In 957, Zhou armies occupied three prefectures in the Qin-Long region and forced Meng Chang to beg for a truce. But the Shu ruler still insisted on keeping his royal title and tried to share the mandate with the northerner as before. Only when the balance of power between the north and south was completely destroyed by the emergence of the Song in the 960s, did the Later Shu finally surrender to northern armies.⁸

Yet the unification of China proper by the Song after 979, did not, in a larger sense, completely change the “sharing” pattern left by the Five Dynasties. The “unified” Northern Song soon faced military threats from the Liao to the north and later, from the Tangut Xixia 西夏 (1038–1227) to the northwest. The war between the Song and the Liao lasted over two decades, before concluding with the treaty of Chanyuan 澶淵 in 1005, which helped maintain the peace for over a century. In the face of the challenges from the Liao and Xixia, the Song dynasty was forced to accept an interstate system in which no single power held primacy, and it dealt with its neighbors in a pragmatic manner.⁹ Such a political configuration continued under the Southern Song 南宋 (1127–1279), which lost its power base in North China to the Jurchen Jin 金 (1115–1234) in the early twelfth century. Only after the Mongol Yuan 元 (1271–1368) achieved a sweeping unification of China, did the pragmatic practice of equal polities within China proper finally fade from the historical stage. China subsequently reverted to traditional structures of diplomacy, wherein the Middle Kingdom assumed a superior sovereignty and treated foreign powers as inferiors.

APPENDIX 1

MAJOR REGIONAL REGIMES
AND THEIR RULERS IN THE LATE TANG
AND EARLY FIVE DYNASTIES PERIODS

LATER LIANG 後梁^a (907–923) (LIANG 883–907)

Zhu Wen 朱溫 (Quanzhong 全忠, 852–912), Governor of Xuanwu, 883;
King of the Liang, 903; Taizu, r. 907–912

Zhu Yougui 朱友珪 (d. 913), Prince of Ying, r. 912–913

Zhu Youzhen 朱友貞 (888–923), Modi, r. 913–923

LATER TANG 後唐^a (923–936) (JIN 晉 882–923)

Li Keyong 李克用 (856–908), Governor of Yanmen, 882; King of the
Jin, 896

Li Cunxu 李存勗 (885–926), King of Jin, 908–923; Zhuangzong,
r. 923–926

Li Siyuan 李嗣源 (867–933), Mingzong, r. 926–933

* * *

CHU 楚^a (896–951)

Ma Yin 馬殷 (852–930), Governor of Wu'an, 896; King of Chu, 907

DINGNAN 定難 (881–982)

Tuoba Sigong 拓拔思恭 (Li Sigong, d.891), Governor of Dingnan, 881

Li Sijian 李思諫 (d. 908), governor 891–896

Li Chengqing 李承慶, governor 896–906

Li Sijian, governor 906–908

Li Yichang 李彝昌, governor 908–909

Li Renfu 李仁福 (d. 933), governor, 909; Prince of Shuofang (?)

JINGNAN 荊南^a (NANPING 南平, 907–963)

Gao Jichang 高季昌 (Jixing 季興) (858–928), Governor of Jingnan, 907; Prince of Nanping, 924

QI 岐 (887–930)

Li Maozhen 李茂貞 (856–924), Governor of Fengxiang, 887; King of the Qi, 901

Li Congyan 李繼暉 (Congyan 李從暉, 898–946), governor 924–930

MIN 閩^a (896–945)

Wang Chao 王潮 (d. 897), Governor of Weiwu, 896

Wang Shenzhi 王審知 (862–925), governor, 897; Prince of Langya 琅琊, 907; Prince of Min, 909

Wang Yanhan 王延翰 (d. 926), Deputy Governor, 925; Governor of Weiwu, 926; King of Min, 926

SHUOFANG 朔方 (LINGWU 靈武, 887–929)

Han 韓?, governor 887–890

Han Zun 韓遵, governor 891–899

Hanxun 韓遜 (d. 914), governor, 899–914; Prince of Yingchuan, 909

Han Zhu 韓洙, governor 914–928

SOUTHERN HAN 南漢^a (905–971)

Liu Yin 劉隱 (874–911), Governor of Qinghai, 905; Prince of Dapeng, 907; Prince of Nanping, 909; King of Nanhai, 911

Liu Yan 劉巖 (劉堯, 889–942), King of Nanhai, 911; Emperor, 917

YIWU 義武 (879–929)

Wang Chucun 王處存 (d. 895), Governor of Yiwu, 879

Wang Gao 王郛, governor 895–900

Wang Chuzhi 王處直 (863–923), governor 900–921; Prince of Beiping, 907

Wang Du 王都 (d. 929), governor 921–929

WU 吳^a (892–937)

Yang Xingmi 楊行密 (842–905), Governor of Huainan, 892; King of Wu, 902

Yang Wo 楊渥 (886–908), King of Wu, 905

Yang Longyan 楊隆演 (897–920), King of Wu, 908; King of Great Wu, 919

Yang Pu 楊溥 (901–938), King of Great Wu, 920; Emperor, 927

WU YUE 吳越^a (893–978)

Qian Liu 錢鏐 (852–932), Governor of Zhenhai, 893; King of Yue, 902; King of Wu Yue, 907

YAN 燕 (895–913)

Liu Rengong 劉仁恭 (847–914), Governor of Lulong, 895

Liu Shouguang 劉守光 (d. 914), Governor of Lulong, 907; King of Yan, 909; Emperor, 911

ZHAO 趙 (CHENGDE 成德/WUSHUN 武順, 883–921)

Wang Rong 王鎔 (873–921), Governor of Chengde, 883; King of Zhao, 907

Zhang Wenli 張文禮 (d. 921), deputy governor 921

* * *

DACHANGHE 大長和 (902–928)

Meng Maisi 鄭買嗣 (d. 909), r. 902–909

Zheng Renmin 鄭仁旻 (d. 926), r. 909–926

KITAN (LIAO) 契丹 (遼) (907–1125)

Yelü Abaoji 耶律阿保機 (872–926), Qaghan, 907; Emperor, 916

Yelü Deguang 耶律德光 (902–947), r. 927–947

Note. This list includes only those autonomous powers that were active at roughly the same period as the Former Shu. Note that not all the rulers of some regimes are given here. For a complete list of the regimes of the Five Dynasties and Ten States and their rulers, see Davis, trans., *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*, xxv–xxvii and Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 9–11. For other independent or semi-independent commands during the period, such as Weibo 魏博, Zhongyi 忠義 and Baoda 保大, see Wan Sitong 萬斯同, *Lidai shibiao* 歷代史表, *juan* 53, “Wudai zhuzhen nianbiao” 五代諸鎮年表. Note that the time periods for the regional

regimes vary significantly among both traditional sources and modern scholarship, due to the application of different standards. Here, for most of them, I chose the years in which their founding rulers (or the first men from their families) took the title governor as the starting dates of the regimes, and the time of their losses of de facto autonomy as the ending dates. The exception is Dingnan, which ended in 982, the year in which the central-plain government (then the Song) lost its nominal control for the first time and had to treat it as an alien equal. For Dingnan, see XWDS 40.436–7; SS 485.13981–95; and Wu, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 121–125. Regarding the ranks of the “king” titles the rulers received, I use “King” to mean “*guo wang*” (nation king) and “Prince” to mean “*jun wang*” (command-area king). A discussion on the difference can be found in Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms,” 158.

^a indicates that the regime belongs to the conventional category of the “Five Dynasties and Ten States.”

APPENDIX 2

MILITARY COMMANDS AND THEIR GOVERNORS OF THE FORMER SHU, 891–925

West Chuan of Jiannan 劍南西川

Year Conquered: 891

Base Prefecture: Yi 益 (Chengdu)

Governor: Wang Jian 王建 (891–907)

East Chuan of Jiannan 劍南東川 (Tianzhen 天貞/ Wude Command 武德軍)

Year Conquered: 897

Base Prefecture: Zi 梓

Governor: Wang Zongdi 王宗滌 (897–901); Wang Zongyu 王宗裕 (901–908, 910–915); Wang Zongji 王宗佺 (before 907); Wang Zongkan 王宗侃 (909); Wang Zongbi 王宗弼 (908–910); Cui Shan 崔善; Wang Zongbo 王宗播 (916–919); Xu Yanqiong 徐彥瓊 (920–924); Song Guangbao 宋光葆 (924–925)

Wuxin Command 武信軍

Year Established: 899

Base Prefecture: Sui 遂

Governor: Wang Zongyao 王宗瑤 (ca. 901–903); Zhao Kuangming 趙匡明 (905); Wang Zongka 王宗侃 (before 907); Zhang Lin 張琳 (before 908); Wang Zongbo 王宗播 (912–915); Chen Xuan 陳綯 (916); Liu Zhijun 劉知俊 (916–917); Wang Zongshou 王宗壽 (923–925)

Lizhou 利州 (Li-Liang 利閬)

Year Established: 903

Base Prefecture: Li 利

Governor: Unknown

Shannan West 山南西 (Tianyi Command 天義軍)

Year Conquered: 902

Base Prefecture: Xingyuan 興元

Governor: Wang Zongdi 王宗滌 (902); Wang Zonghe 王宗賀 (903–906); Wang Zongwan 王宗綰 (907–910); Tang Daoxi 唐道襲 (910–913); Wang Zongsui 王宗錡 (913–916); Wang Zonghan 王宗翰 (916–917); Wang Zongkan 王宗侃 (?); Wang Zongchou 王宗儔 (920–924); Wang Zongwei 王宗威 (924–925)

Wuding Command 武定軍

Year Conquered: 902

Base Prefecture: Yang 洋

Governor: Wang Zongwan 王宗綰 (905); Wang Zongkui 王宗夔 (911–918); Sang Hongzhi 桑弘志 (918–920); Wang Chenzhao 王承肇 (924–925)

Wutai Command 武泰軍 (Qiannan 黔南)

Year Established: 903

Base Prefecture: Qian 黔 (Fu 涪, between 903 and 907)

Governor: Wang Zongben 王宗本 (903); Jin Hui 晉輝 (907–911); Pan Kang 潘炕 (912–913); Wang Zongxun 王宗訓 (913–914); Pan Qiao 潘峭 (914–915); Li Jichong 李繼崇 (916–922); Wang Baoyi 王保義

Wuxiong Command 武雄軍

Year Established: 905

Base Prefecture: Jin 金

Governor: Wang Zonglang 王宗朗 (905–906, 908–920)

Xing-Wen 興文

Year Established: 906

Base Prefecture: Xing 興

Governor: unknown

Zhenjiang Command 鎮江軍

Year Established: 906

Base Prefecture: Zhong 忠 (Kui 夔, after the fourth month of 914)

Governor: Deng Hong 鄧宏 (907–908); Wang Zong'an 王宗黯 (909–912); Wang Zongshou 王宗壽 (913–914); Zhang Wu 張武 (914–916, 924–925); Wang Zongxian 王宗憲 (917–923)

Tianxiong Command 天雄軍

Year Conquered: 915

Base Prefecture: Qin 秦

Governor: Wang Zongchou 王宗儔 (915–916); Tang Wenyi 唐文裔 (916–918); Wang Zongyu 王宗昱 (918–921); Wang Hui 王暉 (921–922); Wang Chengjian 王承檢 (923–924); Wang Chengxiu 王承休 (924–925)

Wuxing Command 武興軍

Year Established: 915

Base Prefecture: Feng 鳳

Governor: Wang Zonglu 王宗魯 (915–918); Wang Zongxin 王宗信 (921–923); Wang Chengjie 王承捷 (924–925)

Yongping Command 永平軍

Year Established: unknown

Base Prefecture: Ya 雅

Governor: Zhou Xiang 周庠 (920–922); Li Jun 李筠 (923–924); Ma Quan 馬全 (925)

Zhaowu Command 昭武軍

Year Established: unknown

Base Prefecture: Li 利

Governor: Lin Si'e 林思謬 (924–925)

Yongtai Command 永泰軍

Year Established: unknown

Base Prefecture: unknown

Governor: Lu Qianyi 鹿虔扈

Sources. This list is based mainly on Zhu, *Wudai shiguo fangzhen nianbiao*, 235–246 and 545–611, supplemented by *XWDS* 60.713–746; *XTS*, *juan* 67 and 68; *SGCQ*, ch.113, “Shiguo fangzhen biao” 十國藩鎮表; Wu, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 650–677, 955–1018; 1183–1185, 1189–1192, and Kurihara, *Godai Sōsho hanchin nenpyō*, as well as my own research.

Note. This table is an attempt to cover all the commands that the Former Shu ever administered from 891 to 925, including both those occupied before 907 and those that were established later and maintained until the downfall of the regime in 925. Clearly not all of these commands existed at the same time. Except for Xichuan, Lizhou, Xing-Wen, Wuxiong (Jinzhou) and Yongtai, the commands listed here lasted until 925 and were taken over by the Later Tang. Only the base prefectures of the commands are given here, because the frequent changes in the period make it difficult to provide an accurate list of the prefectures under each command. For a complete list of the prefectures controlled by the Former Shu (fifty two in its heyday), see *XWDS* 60.720, 728–732. The period of tenure of a governor, when applicable, is put in parenthesis following his name. The names of the commands are arranged according to the dates they were occupied or established.

APPENDIX 3

THE ADOPTED SONS (*JIAZI*) OF WANG JIAN

Name (original name)	Year recruited (adopted)	Origin	Military title	Civil title
Wang Zongyu 王宗裕	Before 875	R X Z	C1 C2	G Pr
Wang Zongsui 王宗鑑	Before 875	R X Z	C1 C2	G Pr M
Wang Zongshou 王宗壽	Before 875	R X Z	C1 C2	G Pr M
Wang Zonghan 王宗翰 (Meng 孟)	885–6	R X Z	C1 C2	G Pr M
Wang Zongfan 王宗範 (Zhang 張)	Before 875	R X Z	C2	Pr M
Wang Zongbi 王宗弼 (Wei Hongfu 魏弘夫) (d.925)	876 (887)	X Z	C1 C2	G Pr M
Wang Zongji 王宗佺 (Gan 甘) (d.908)	878	Z	C1 C2	G M
Wang Zongkan 王宗侃 (Tian Shikan 田師侃) (858–923)	Before 881 (887)	X Z	C1 C2	G Pr M
Wang Zongyao 王宗瑤 (Jiang Zhi 姜郢)	Before 881 (887)	X Z	C1 C2	G Pr M
Wang Zonglu 王宗魯	Before 883	Z	C1	G
Wang Zongshu 王宗鋹 (Li Wu 李武)	884	X Z	C3	P
Wang Zongdi 王宗滌 (Hua Hong 華洪) (d.902/903)	884 (897)	X Z	C1 C2	G

(continued on next page)

APPENDIX 3 (*continued*)

Name (original name)	Year recruited (adopted)	Origin	Military title	Civil title
Wang Zongbo 王宗播 (Xu Cun 許存) (856–923)	896	C	C2	G Pr M
Wang Zongbian 王宗弁 (Lu Bian 鹿弁)	Before 887	Z		P
Wang Zongyou 王宗佑	Before 887	Z	C2	M
Wang Zonghao 王宗浩 (d.911)	Before 887	Z	C1	P
Wang Zongduo 王宗鐸	Before 887	Z	C2	P
Wang Zong'e 王宗鏐	Before 887	Z	C1 C2	
Wang Zongxian 王宗憲 (Xu 許)	Before 887	Z X		G
Wang Zongchou 王宗儔	Before 887	Z	C1 C2	G M
Wang Zongru 王宗儒 (Yang Ru 楊儒)	890	C		
Wang Zongruan 王宗阮 (Wen Wujian 文武堅)	890 (891)	C	C1 C2	P
Wang Zongben 王宗本 (Xie Congben 謝從本)	890 (891)	C	C2	G
Wang Zongwo 王宗渥 (Zhengwo 鄭渥)	Adopted 891		C1	
Wang Zong'an 王宗黯 (Ji Jian 吉諫)	Adopted 892		C1 C2	Pr M
Wang Zongmian 王宗勉 (Zhao Zhang 趙章)	Adopted 894	C		
Wang Zongxun 王宗訓 (Wang Maoquan 茂權) (d.914)	Adopted 894		C1	G
Wang Zongjin 王宗謹 (Wang Zhao 釗)	Adopted 894		C2	P
Wang Zongwan 王宗綰 (Li Wan 李綰)	Adopted 894		C2	G Pr M

(continued on next page)

APPENDIX 3 (*continued*)

Name (original name)	Year recruited (adopted)	Origin	Military title	Civil title
Wang Zongju 王宗矩 (Hou Ju 侯矩)	903	C		P
Wang Zonglang 王宗朗 (Quan Shilang 全師朗)	905	C		G M
Wang Zongkui 王宗夔 (858–918)			C2	Pr M
Wang Zongwei 王宗偉			C2	P
Wang Zonghe 王宗賈			C1 C2	G M
Wang Zongshao 王宗紹			C2	M
Wang Zongfen 王宗汾			C1 C2	
Wang Zong-xun 王宗勳			C1 C2	
Wang Zongyan 王宗儼			C1 C2	
Wang Zong-yu 王宗昱			C2	G M
Wang Zong-yan 王宗晏			C1 C2	
Wang Zongxin 王宗信			C1 C2	
Wang Zonghong 王宗宏			C2	
Wang Zongrui 王宗納			C2	G
Wang Zong-wei 王宗威				G M
Wang Zongyi 王宗裔				Pr M
Wang Zongjiang 王宗絳				
Wang Zongtao 王宗韜				P
Wang Zongjie 王宗玠				P
Wang Zongwen 王宗汶				P
Wang Zongke 王宗恪			C1	
Wang Zongzhuan 王宗瑑				P

Key:

Origin R: relatives C: captured men X: Xuzhou natives Z: Zhongwu soldiers*Military Title* C1: commander of regiments C2: commander of campaigns

C3: junior general

Civil Title G: governor M: central government offices P: prefectural level offices

Pr: prince

Sources. The list is made based mainly on ZZTJ, XWDS, JGZ, and SGCQ. The biographies of the first 45 men except for Zongshu can be found in SGCQ, *juan* 39. For Zongshu's biography, see JGZ 6.9b–10a. The name of Zongjiang is only mentioned once in ZZTJ (269.8798), but the commentator Hu Sanxing believes it should be a misprint of Zongwan, according to the logic of the narrative. Though possibly a error made by the original compilers of ZZTJ or later transcribers, I still list it here in case there might be another adopted son who bore the name. The name of Zongtao is only found in an appointment decree of the Former Shu. See Xue Tinggui 薛廷珪, "Shou Wang Zongkui Zongtao Qiong Han er zhou Zhang Wuxi Shuzhou cishi deng zhi" 授王宗夔宗韜邛漢二州張無忌蜀州刺史等制, in QTW, 838.4b–5a (8820). The names and offices of Zongjie, Zongwen, Zongke, and Zongzhuang are recorded in the Daoist memorials (*jiaoci* 醮詞) composed by Du Guangting. See "Qian Jiazhou Tuanlianshi Sikong Wang Zongjie benming ci" 前嘉州團練使司空王宗玠本命詞, in QTW 943.6b–8a (9802–9803); "Yansheshi Zongwen jiuyao jiaoci" 宴設使宗汶九曜醮詞, in QTW 938.2b–3a (9758); "Yongsheng Sikong Zongke jiuyao jiaoci" 勇勝司空宗恪九曜醮詞, in QTW 937.14b–15a (9755); and "Wang Zongzhuang" 王宗瑑六甲醮詞, in QTW 937.13a–b (9755), respectively. The three *jiaoci* are also found in GCJ, *juan* 8.

Note. I give the years only for those whose recruitment or adoption dates either are clearly indicated in the sources or can be clearly inferred from the sources. Some points need to be noted here: (1) The first five men were actually some kind of relatives of Wang Jian, not his "adopted sons" in a strict sense: Zongyu was said to hail from his clan (*zongshu* 宗屬); Zongsui was a son of one of his cousins (*zongzi* 從子); Zongshou, according to ZZTJ (267.8728) and JGZ (6.2b), also came from the same family (*zong ren zhi zi* 宗人之子), though XWDS (63.794) says that he was from an obscure family in Xuzhou with the same surname "Wang" and was then adopted by Wang Jian; Zonghan was Wang Jian's nephew (the son of his older sister) upon whom Wang Jian "bestowed the surname Wang" only after 910; Zongfan, a stepson of Wang Jian, changed his name at the age of ten, after his mother was joined to Wang Jian as a concubine, and his original surname, according to ZZTJ (267.8728), is "Zhang 張," which was recorded as "章" in JGZ (6.11b). Here the former spelling is followed; (2) The original name of Zongbi varies among sources, "Wei Hongfu 魏弘夫" in XWDS (63.794) and ZZTJ (257.8367), "Wei Hongfu 魏宏夫" in JGZ (6.10a) and SGCQ (39.574). Here again ZZTJ is followed; (3) Zongkan, according to SGCQ (39.572), was a native of Yazhou, but here I follow JGZ (6.7a) which says he was from Xuchang (a county of Xuzhou); (4) Zongyao seemed to be the same person recorded in BMSY (20.356–357), who, named Jiang Zhi 姜誌, hailed from Xuchang. Known as Jiang Taishi 姜太師 in a similar account, he is said to have been from Xutian 許田, apparently a misprint for Xuchang. See *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in TPGJ 500.4103–4104. This place of origin is used here, though it should be noted that Zongyao might originally have hailed from Yan (Hebei province) and "have been registered in the military household at Xuchang" (隸許昌軍籍), according to JGZ (6.7b) and ZZTJ (257.8367); (5) Zongxian is recorded as "許宗憲" in JYL (5.10b–11b).

APPENDIX 4

CIVIL OFFICIALS UNDER WANG JIAN'S RULE, 891–918

Name	Native place	Origin	Year employed	Highest Office
Chen Xiang 陳翔	N	T	Before 907	L
Cui Yanchang 崔延昌				C
Dou Yong 竇雍				C
Du He 杜何	N	F		C
Fang Congzhen 房從真	S			C
Fang E 房譔	N	F		C
Feng Juan 馮涓	O	A F T	Ca.891	C
Gao Daoxing 高道興	S		918	C
Gao Zhiyan 高知言				C
Gao Zhu 高燭			Before 896	C
Gu Xiong 顧夔				C
Hou He 侯翮	S	T	Before 907	C
Hu Xiulin 胡秀林	N	T		C
Jiang Zhaogong 蔣詔恭	O			L
Li Chou 李稠	N	F		C
Li Dao'an 李道安				C
Li Hao 李昊 (892–966)	N	F	916	L
Li Hong 李紘				C
Li Jing 李景				L

(continued on next page)

APPENDIX 4 (*continued*)

Name	Native place	Origin	Year employed	Highest Office
Li Renbiao 李仁表	N	F		C
Li Xun 李珣	S	A F T		C?
Liu Tan 劉檀				C
Liu Yinci 劉隱辭				L
Liu Zuan 劉纂	O	F		C
Lu Yanrang 盧延讓	N	A	902	C
Lu Qianyi 鹿虔扈			Before 903	M
Lu Wei 盧蔚				C
Ma Chuqian 馬處謙	N		905	C
Mao Wenxi 毛文錫	N	A F T		M
Mao Wenyan 毛文晏	N			C
Mao Wenhui 毛文徽	N			
Mo Tingyi 莫庭乂				L
Niu Jiao 牛嶠	N	A F T	Before 907	C
Ouyang Bin 歐陽彬	O			C
Ouyang Jiong 歐陽炯 (896–971)	S	F		C
Ouyang Rou 歐陽柔				C
Pan Kang 潘炕 (d. 914)	N			M
Pan Qiao 潘峭	N			M
Pan Jiao 潘嶠	N			C
Pan Wan 潘玘			Before 901	C
Shi Qinruo 石欽若			915	
Song Pin 宋玘		F? T?		C
Su Shaoyuan 蘇紹元				C
Sun Guangxian 孫光憲 (d.968)	S		915	L
Tang Feng 唐峰	S			L

(*continued on next page*)

APPENDIX 4 (*continued*)

Name	Native place	Origin	Year employed	Highest Office
Wang Baohui 王保晦 (d. 918)	S		Ca.901	C
Wang E 王鄂	N	F		L?
Wang Fu 王福	N	F		L
Wang Jin 王進		T		C
Wang Kai 王鏐	N	T	903	M
Wang Pu 王樸	S	A F		C
Wang Renyu 王仁裕 (880–956)	N		915	L
Wang Xiancheng 王先成	S		Before 892	L
Wei Ai 韋藹	N	F		C
Wei Xun 韋巽	N	F		C
Wei Zhuang 韋莊 (846–910)	N	A F T	901	M
Wen Yi 溫顗	N	F T		
Xu Geng 徐耕	N	T	After 891	C
Xu Ji 許寂 (d. 936)	O	T	905	C
Xu Jianfu 徐簡夫				C
Yang Bin 楊玢	N	F T		C
Yang Ding 楊鼎				C
Yang Yifang 楊義方	S	A		C
Yang Yunzhong 楊蘊中		A		C
Yu Chuansu 庾傳素				M
Yu Chuanchang 庾傳昌 (d.916)	O	F		C
Yu Ningji 庾凝績	O	F		M
Zhang Daogu 張道古 (d. 909)	N	A T	Before 907	C
Zhang Bin 張蠙	N	A T	Before 907	C/L

(*continued on next page*)

APPENDIX 4 (*continued*)

Name	Native place	Origin	Year employed	Highest Office
Zhang Fu 張扶	S			C
Zhang Ge 張格 (d. 927)	N	F T	903	M
Zhang Lin 張琳 (d. before 908)	N	T	Ca.888	M
Zhao Wengui 趙溫珪	N			C
Zheng Qian 鄭騫				C
Zheng Xu 鄭頊	O		Before 892	M
Zhong Tingyu 仲廷預				L
Zhou Xiang 周庠 (857–922)	N	T	887	M
Zhu 朱 ?				C

Key:

Native Place N: North China S: Shu O: other regions of China

Background A: holding a *jinshi* degree T: former Tang officials

F: hailing from elite family

Highest Office M: jiedushi or shumishi C: central government posts L: local posts

Sources: Most of the people listed in this table have biographies in *SGCQ*, chap. 40–46, 52, 56, 102, and 115. Below are the sources for those whose names are not mentioned in this study: Cui Yanchang in *ZZTJ* 270.8825; Gao Zhiyan in *ZZTJ* 271.8861; Lu Wei in *GCJ* 4.20; Mo Tingyi in *GCJ* 6.29–32; Ouyang Rou in *XWDS* 63.788; Pan Jiao in *ZZTJ* 268.8774; Shi Qinruo in *BMSY* 7.159; Song Pin in *XWDS* 63.787; Su Shaoyuan in *GCJ* 7.34; Tang Feng in *BMSY* 12.266; Wang Fu in *Henan xiansheng wenji*, 13.63; Wang Jin in *STW* 1.5b; Wei Ai in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, 40.12; Xu Geng in *STW* 1.20b; Xu Jianfu in *ZZTJ* 268.8773; Yang Ding in *GCJ* 7.35; and Zheng Qian in *ZZTJ* 266.8693 and *XWDS* 63.787–788. This list has also drawn on some studies by modern scholars, such as Chen Shangjun, “Huajian ciren shiji” and Zhang Hai, “Qian Hou Shu zuojia kaolue,” which have helped correct some mistaken accounts in the sources, like *SGCQ*—for example, as regards the careers of Ouyang Bin and Ouyang Jiong.

Note: The table here is far from complete and is only meant to include as many as possible of the literati whose names and careers under Wang Jian's rule are clearly recorded in extant sources, such as *ZZTJ*, *XWDS*, *JWDS*, *JGZ*, *STW*, *SGCQ* and other historical and literary collections. Thus it does not cover men whose bureaucratic careers are only mentioned by sources when referring to the reign of Wang Yan, though they might have served

Wang Jian, this omitted class includes men such as Zhang Yun 張雲 (SGCQ 43.637–638). Neither does it include the “second generation,” though some of them evidently also had offices under Wang Jian, such as Pan Zaiying (JGZ 6.16–7 and SGCQ 46.661, son of Pan Kang), Niu Xiji (SGCQ 44.646–647, nephew of Niu Jiao), and Tang Daoxi (SGCQ 46.659–660, son of Tang Feng).

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. *Xin Wudai shi* (XWDS hereafter), 61.747. The translation is from Richard L. Davis, trans., *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*, 467. Hereafter, all the translations of the passages from XWDS, if not indicated, are quoted from Professor Davis' elegant work.
2. The "Five dynasties" were the Later Liang 後梁 (907–923), Later Tang 後唐 (923–937), Later Jin 後晉 (937–947), Later Han 後漢 (947–951) and Later Zhou 後周 (951–960); the "Ten States" were Wu 吳 (892–937), Southern Tang 南唐 (937–975), Former Shu 前蜀 (891–925), Later Shu 後蜀 (925–965), Min 閩 (896–945), Southern Han 南漢 (905–971), Chu 楚 (896–951), Wu Yue 吳越 (893–978), Jingnan 荆南 (907–963) and Northern Han 北漢 (951–979). Among the "Ten States," only the Northern Han was in North China. For other contemporary regimes, see appendix 1.
3. Such interest, for example, can be seen in two grand films produced by top-ranked directors in 2006: *Curse of the Golden Flower* (*Mancheng jindai huangjinjia* 滿城盡帶黃金甲) directed by Zhang Yimou 張藝謀 and *The Banquet* (*Yeyan* 夜宴) by Feng Xiaogang 馮小剛, both using the Five Dynasties and Ten States period as the setting.
4. Here I list a few important works specifically on the political history of the period, the field with which this study is most concerned: works in Chinese include Tao, *Wudai shilue*; Zheng, *Wudai shiguo yanjiu*; Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*; and Fan, *Tangmo Wudai de Daibei jituan*. Japanese studies include Hino, "Godai chishō ko"; Sudō, "Godai setsudoshi no shihai taisei"; Miyazaki, "Gaodai gunbatsu no keitō"; Hino, *Godai shi no kichō*; Satake, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū*; and Hori, *Tōmatsu godai henkakuki no seiji to keizai*. For works in English, see Wang, *The Structure of Power in North China during the Five Dynasties*; Worthy, "Diplomacy for Survival: Domestic and Foreign Relations of Wu Yueh 907–978"; Kurz, "The Yangzi in the Negotiations between the Southern Tang and its Northern Neighbours (Mid-Tenth Century)"; Fang, "Power Structures and Cultural Identities in Imperial China: Civil and Military Power from Late Tang to Early Song Dynasties (A.D. 875–1063)"; Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty: Frontier Crossing in Liao China*; Standen, "The Five Dynasties" and Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms between the T'ang and the Sung,

- 907–979.” For a more extensive survey of the scholarship on some other subjects related to the period, see Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 3–6. A brief survey of Chinese scholarship on the Five Dynasties period can be found in Chen, ed., *Zhongguo shidai: Wudai/Liao/Song/Xia/Jin shiqi*, 97–99; for Japanese scholarship, see Toriya and Yoshida, *Godai shi kenkyū bunken mokuroku*.
5. For the traditional Chinese idea of great unity, see Loewe, “China’s Sense of Unity as Seen in the Early Empires”; Yuri, “‘The One That Pervade the All’ in Ancient Chinese Political Thought: The Origins of ‘the Great Unity’ Paradigm”; Qi, “Gudai Zhongguo ‘guojia tongyi’ de lishi yichan he lishi chuantong.”
 6. *Song shi* (SS hereafter), 1.2–4 and 4.53. For the founding of Song, see also Worthy, “The Founding of Sung China, 950–1000: Integrative Changes in Military and Political Institutions”; Lorge, “War and the Creation of the Northern Song”; Lorge, “The Entrance and Exit of the Song Founders”; Lau and Huang, “Founding and Consolidation of the Sung Dynasty under T’ai-tsu (960–976), T’ai-tsung (976–997), and Chen-tsung (997–1022).”
 7. *Zizhi tongjian* (ZZTJ hereafter), *juan* 266–294.
 8. *Jiu Wudai shi* (JWDS hereafter), *juan* 132–136.
 9. *XWDS*, *juan* 1–12 and 61–70, respectively. Although Ouyang Xiu claimed that none of the Five Dynasties regimes was legitimate in his “Treatise on Legitimate Succession” (“Zhengtong lun” 正統論), he obviously did not adhere to this theory in his own historiographical practice, as shown in the *XWDS*. For Ouyang’s points of legitimate succession, see Rao, *Zhongguo shixue shang zhi zhengtong lun*, 74–85, esp. 74–75, 79, 82, 84; Davis, “Historiography as Politics in Yang Wei-Chen’s ‘Polemic on Legitimate Succession’,” 38–40, 62nn87–88; Davis, “Historical Critic or Cultural Mediator—Ouyang Xiu on Legitimate Rule”; Davis, “Martial Men and Military Might in the Historical Writing of Ouyang Xiu,” 778–781. For Ouyang’s ambivalent attitude and his historiographical treatment of the politics of the Five Dynasties, see also So, “Negotiating Chinese Identity in Five Dynasties Narratives: From the Old History to the New History,” 228–232; Kurz, “A Survey of the Historical Sources for the Five Dynasties and Ten States in Song Times,” 188–191.
 10. *Wuguo gushi* (hereafter WGGs). For example, see the chapters entitled “Wei Wu Yang shi” 偽吳楊氏, “Wei Tang Li shi” 偽唐李氏, and “Wei Shu Meng shi” 偽蜀孟氏 in *juan* 1; and “Wei Han Pengcheng shi” 偽漢彭城氏, and “Wei Min Wang shi” 偽閩王氏 in *juan* 2.

11. Besides the works mentioned above, see also *Wudai huiyao* (WDHY hereafter). The ambivalent attitude of the Song people to the Liang is discussed in Guo, *Wudai shiliao tanyuan*, 3, 31–34, 76, 113, 116.
12. For a comprehensive study of *zhengtong*, see Rao, *Zhongguo shixue shang zhi zhengtong lun*; the Song view of *zhengtong* can be found in Chen, “Songdai zhengtong lun de xingcheng beijing jiqi neirong” and Davis, “Historiography as Politics.”
13. For example, in the Southern Song (1127–1279), as the Chinese government retreated to the south under the attack of the Jurchen Jin (1115–1234), certain historians started to give legitimacy to some historical southern regimes, aiming to improve the orthodoxy of their own court in the south. This can be seen from Lu You’s (1125–1210) *Nan Tang shu*, in which he wrote the “Annals” for all the rulers of the Southern Tang. For a discussion of the changing attitude of the Southern Song historians, see Davis, “Historiography as Politics,” 40–42. Later in the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), some historians also attempted to justify the imperial status of some “states” in their writings on the Five Dynasties period. The most representative are Wu Renchen, who compiled “Basic Annals” for those royal houses of the “Ten States” in his *Shiguo chunqiu* (SGCQ hereafter), and Chen Zhan, who claimed the Southern Tang as the orthodox power after the fall of the Later Tang in his *Xu Tang shu*.
14. This imbalance has been pointed out by Edward H. Schafer a half century ago, and though there has been more attention paid to the southern regimes recently, it has not yet been satisfactorily corrected. For Schafer’s comment, see his *The Empire of Min*, viii. A similar comment is also found in Kurz, “Sources for the History of the Southern Tang (937–975),” 217–218. For recent studies on the political history of the “Ten States” (most focusing on the Southern Tang and in Asian languages), see Krompart, *The Southern Restoration of T’ang: Counsel, Policy and Parahistory in the Stabilization of the Chiang-Huai Region, 887–943*; Worthy, “Diplomacy for Survival”; Kurz, “The Yangzi in the Negotiations”; Clark, *Portrait of a Community: Society, Culture, and the Structures of Kinship in the Mulan River Valley (Fujian) from the Late Tang through the Song*; Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms”; Yang, *Qian Shu Hou Shu shi*; Ren, *Nan Tang shi*; Xu, *Min guo shi*; Zou, *Nan Tang guoshi*; Ren, ed., *Shiguo dianzhi kao*; He, *Lishi Nan Tang guoshi lungao*; Itō, “Tōmatsu Godai ki ni okeru kōsei chiiki no zaichi seiryoku nitsuite”; Itō, “Go/Nan Tō seiken no shomon-dai”; Satake, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū*, 261–310 and 391–549; Yamazaki, “Go Etsu kokuō to shinō gainen: Godai jukoku no Chūka

- chitsujo.” For a survey of modern works on the Southern Tang specifically, see Kurz, “Sources for the History of the Southern Tang,” 231–235.
15. This trend can actually be traced back to Song times. The conventional category of “Ten States” coined in the Song, for example, only covers two regimes (the Wu and Former Shu) that did not survive to the second half of the tenth century, but fails to include some other powers active in the early period, such as the Qi and Yan. Although part of the reason could be the fact that more materials on the later regimes might have remained in the early Song, this selection probably reflects the Song historians’ interest in those states closer to their own age.
 16. Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 3.
 17. *Hanyu dacidian*, 3:630, entry for “*guo*.”
 18. The earliest usage of the word “*Wudai*” to refer to the five northern dynasties of the tenth century can be traced to the early 960s, as seen in the titles of *Wudai huiyao* and *Wudai chunqiu*. As for the word “*Shiguo*,” it was not formally coined until the eleventh century, as Ouyang Xiu wrote the “*Shiguo shijia*” 十國世家 in his *XWDS*. But obviously the practice of using “*guo*” to refer to the southern regimes of the day was not an innovation of Ouyang Xiu, who seemed to have followed some earlier works, such as *WGGS* and Lu Zhen’s *Jiuguozhi* (hereafter *JGZ*). A brief discussion of Ouyang’s problematic category can also be found in Kurz, “A Survey of the Historical Sources,” 188–191 and Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China, 900–1795*, 18.
 19. *XWDS* 71.873 (五代十國稱帝改元者七); see note 18.
 20. Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 177–188; Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 86–87.
 21. For the Later Zhou’s unification efforts, see Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” 112–132; Davis, “The Heroism of Chou Shih-tsung in the Eleventh Century: Perspectives from the Historical Records of the Five Dynasties”; Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 294–349; Li, “Zhou Shizong lun.”
 22. Lorge, “War and the Creation of the Northern Song”; Lorge, “From Warlord to Emperor: Song Taizu’s Change of Heart during the Conquest of Shu”; and Lau and Huang, “Founding and Consolidation of the Sung Dynasty,” 215–229, 242–247.
 23. *Du Tongjian lun*, 28.605–606.
 24. For the histories of these states, see *JWDS*, *juan* 132–136; *XWDS*, *juan* 61–70; and relevant chapters in *SGCQ*. For a survey in English, see Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms,” 140–158.
 25. *XWDS* 71.873.

26. This problem has been noticed by some scholars recently. For example, Naomi Standen pointed out that the significance of Jin (Taiyuan Jin in her work) and Yan (Youzhou) is usually downplayed by present-day historians, but their power is unavoidably apparent in the eleventh century sources. See "(Re)Constructing the Frontiers of Tenth-Century North China," 75–76.
27. For example, the three regimes in Heibei, Zhao 趙, Yiwu 義武, and Weibo 魏博. See Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 208–215.
28. The significant role played by the Liao in the tenth century has been studied in detail by Naomi Standen. See "Raiding and Frontier Society in the Five Dynasties"; "What Nomads Want: Raids, Invasions, and the Liao Conquest of 947" and her most recent work, *Unbounded Loyalty*. See also Twitchett and Tietze, "The Liao," 53–87 and Xing, "Qidan yu Wudai zhengquan gengdie zhi guanxi."
29. Zeng, "Wudai Nanping shi santi," 84–90; for more sources on Jingnan, see the references in chapter 4.
30. The inconsistency is even found in the *XWDS*, in which Ouyang Xiu first admitted Yan and Qi as "states" but then denied them in the "Shiguo shijia." See *XWDS* 60.713 (梁初天下別為十一國。。。。。。西有岐蜀，北有燕晉). Before Ouyang's classification, the *JWDS* includes another six powers in its chapters for "Shixi" and "Jianwei," including Yan, Qi, Dingnan 定難, Lingwu 靈武, Wuping 武平, Baoda 保大. See *JWDS*, *juan* 132–136.
31. For example, Kurihara Masuo in his *Godai Sōsho hanchin nenpyō* simply treated Qi and Yan and some other independent regimes as "commands" (*fanzhen* 藩鎮) subject to the Central-Plain dynasties. Admittedly, a few scholars have noticed the problem of the Song category, such as Fu Lecheng 傅樂成, but the issue has not yet been widely recognized. See Fu, *Sui Tang wudai shi*, 176.
32. Wu Renchen, "Shiguo chunqiu xu" 十國春秋序, in *SGCQ*, 4.
33. For a brief survey of such state relations in Chinese history, see Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven: Studies in Sung-Liao Relations*, 5–7. For detailed studies on interstate relations from late Zhou to early Tang, see Walker, *The Multi-State System of Ancient China*; Cai, *Zhongguo qianqi de jiaopin yu nanbei hudong*; and Pan, *Son of Heaven and Heavenly Qaghan: Sui-Tang China and Its Neighbors*.
34. The theory of the "balance of power system" was proposed by Richard L. Walker in his study of the multistate system of ancient China. Edmund H. Worthy first adopted it to interpret the power relations between the Wu Yue and its surrounding rivals. See Walker, *The Multi-state System of Ancient China* and Worthy, "Diplomacy for Survival," respectively.

35. Worthy, "Diplomacy for Survival."
36. For the negotiation between Zhou and Southern Tang along the Yanzi, see Kurz, "The Yangzi in the Negotiations," 36–42; Standen, "The Five Dynasties," 124–128.
37. Worthy, "Diplomacy for Survival."
38. Zeng, "Wudai Nanping shi santi"; and Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 175–177.
39. Kurz, "The Yangzi in the Negotiations," 3.
40. As Ouyang Xiu observed, seven of the "Ten States" assumed royal titles and eight adopted imperial calendars during the tenth century. See *XWDS* 71.873. The legitimization efforts of the northern dynasties, such as the Liang and Tang, can be found in Fang, "The Price of Orthodoxy: Issues of Legitimacy in the Later Liang and Later Tang."
41. *JWDS* 133.1768, 1770–1771. For the great honors the Wu Yue obtained from other northern dynasties, see Yamazaki, "Go Etsu kokuō to shinō gainen." Mingzong's pragmatic management can also be seen in his control over North China not by trying to unite it but merely by exerting his authority over it. See Standen, "The Five Dynasties," 76.
42. For the details, see chapter 6.
43. *XWDS* 68.854. See also Schafer, *Empire of Min*, 62.
44. Kurz, "The Yangzi in the Negotiations," 32–35; and Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 263–278.
45. For example, on the original domains of Chu and Min that had been destroyed by the Southern Tang, new powers (commands of Wuping and Qingyuan 清源) arose and remained independent as before. For the two commands, see *SS* 483.13947–13951 and 13957–13965 respectively.
46. Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 143–176, esp. 143–148; Hino, *Tō matsu konranshi kō*, 582–604; and Yamane Naoki, "Tangchao junzheng tongzhi de zhongju yu Wudai shiguo geju de kaiduan."
47. Twitchett, "Varied Patterns of Provincial Autonomy in the T'ang Dynasty," 105.
48. Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 143–176, esp. 143–148; Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms," 189–190; Hino, *Godai shi no kichō*, 296–241. Peter Lorge has offered a very insightful point on this issue: to recreate an empire like the Tang, a regional ruler had to transcend his regional power base and directly engage the "higher order political structures," a mission that most Five Dynasties strongmen failed. See Lorge, *War, Politics and Society*, 8–9.
49. For the military nature of the late Tang and Five Dynasties, see Worthy, "The Founding of Sung China," 295–316; Davis, "Martial Men and

- Military Might”; Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” 39–45; Hori, “Tōmatsu Sho Hanran no Seikaku—Chūgoku ni okeru Kizokuseiji no Botsuraku nit suite”; and Hino, *Godai shi no kichō*, 153–198. For the origins of the founders of the regional regimes during this time, see Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 47–118; Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” 39–74; Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms,” 140–159; Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang: Tang Song zhiji zi bei xiang nan de yimin yuqi yingxiang*, 43–56.
50. A similar observation can be found in Fang, “The Price of Orthodoxy.” For the civil pursuits of the rulers of the day, see also Clark, 160–163.
 51. This point can be clearly seen in the case of the Southern Tang, which negotiated with the northern dynasties based on the Yangzi River. See Kurz, “The Yangzi in the Negotiations.”
 52. For a discussion of the historical records on the tenth century, see Guo, *Wudai shiliao tanyuan*; Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu*, 307–343; and Xie, “Tan Wudai shiguo de shixue fazhan” and *Sui Tang Wudai shixue*, 307–356. A relatively complete survey of the sources compiled in the Song times can be found in Kurz, “A Survey of the Historical Sources for the Five Dynasties and Ten States in Song Times.”
 53. For the comments on these dynastic histories, see Wang, “The Chiu Wu-tai Shih and History-Writing during the Five Dynasties”; Wang, “Some Comments on the Later Standard Histories”; Chan, “The Historiography of the Tzu-chih T’ung-chien: A Survey”; and Hervouet, ed., *A Sung Bibliography*, 61–63, 69–70.
 54. *Shu taowu* (hereafter *STW*); *Jianjie lu* (hereafter *JJL*); *Jinli qijiu zhuan* (hereafter *JLQJZ*).
 55. *Beimeng suoyan* (hereafter *BMSY*).
 56. Note that as a work written nearly seven centuries later and a recompilation of previous texts without giving references to its own sources, the *SGCQ* has to be treated as a source of secondary authority. Schafer once expressed a similar worry in his study on the Min, see *The Empire of Min*, xii. Some problems of the *SGCQ* have been noticed recently, see Zheng, “*Shiguo chunqiu jiaodu zhaji*.”
 57. To name just a few, *Chanyue ji* (hereafter *CYJ*); *Guangcheng ji* (hereafter *GCJ*); *Quan Tang wen* (hereafter *QTW*); *Cefu yuangui* (hereafter *CFYG*); *Yudi jisheng*; *Shu bei ji*; and Feng Hanji, *Qian Shu Wang Jian mu fajue baogao*.
 58. Among the most important are Yang, *Qian Shu Hou Shu shi*; Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*; Chengdu Wang Jian mu bowuguan, ed., *Qian/Hou Shu de lishi yu wenhua*; Xu, “Lun Wang Jian jiqi Qian Shu zhengquan

- de lishi diwei”; Kurihara, “Tōmatsu no dogōteki zaichi shiryoku nit suite—Shisen no I Kunsei no baai”; Satake, “Tō Sō henkakuki ni okeru Shisen Seitofuro chiiki shakai no hembō ni tsuite”; Satake, “Tōdai Shisen chiiki shakai no hembō to sono tokushitsu”; Satake, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū*; Peterson, “Corruption Unmasked: Yuan Chen’s Investigations in Szechwan”; Lo, *Szechwan in Sung China: A Case Study in the Political Integration of the Chinese Empire*; von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times*; and Smith, *Taxing Heaven’s Storehouse: Horses, Bureaucrats, and the Destruction of the Sichuan Tea Industry, 1074–1224*.
59. Megill, “Recounting the Past: ‘Description,’ Explanation, and Narrative in Historiography,” 653.

CHAPTER 1

1. *Quan Tang shi* (QTS hereafter), 162.1680.
2. BMSY 4.75.
3. For the territory of the Former Shu, see Tan, ed., *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 5:91.
4. For the geography and climate of Shu centered in the Sichuan Basin, see Du and Tang, ed., *Zhongguo ditu ji*, 180–183, 186–188.
5. For the history of ancient Shu and its relations with North China, see Duan, *Bashu gudai wenming yanjiu*, 27–70, 184–194, 274–318; Tong, *Gudai de Bashu*, 47–49; Meng, *Bashu gushi lunshu*; Deng, *Bashu shiji tansuo*; and Gu, *Bashu yu zhongyuan de guanxi*.
6. For the history of ancient Shu and its relations with North China, see Duan, *Bashu gudai wenming yanjiu*, 27–70, 184–194, 274–318; Tong, *Gudai de Bashu*, 47–49; Meng, *Bashu gushi lunshu*; Deng, *Bashu shiji tansuo*; and Gu, *Bashu yu zhongyuan de guanxi*.
7. For the origins of the Ba and Shu peoples and their states, see Sage, chaps. 2–3 in *Ancient Sichuan and the Unification of China*, and Kleeman, *Great Perfection: Religion and Ethnicity in a Chinese Millennial Kingdom*, 11–60.
8. HYGZ 3.202. For economic development during the period, see Meng et al., *Sichuan gudai shigao*, 51–59, 79–92.
9. The Shudao, in a broader sense, includes the roads from both Gansu and Shaanxi to Shu, but most Chinese people used to refer to the Shudao as the road linking the Chengdu plain with Guanzhong in the Wei River plains of Shaanxi province. In this narrow meaning of the Shudao, it still includes several routes which might join in some places. For a general survey of

- Shudao, see Wiens, "The Shu Tao or Road to Szechwan;" Tong, *Gudai de Bashu*, 88–89; and Li, Yan, and Hu, *Shudao huagu*.
10. Duan, *Bashu gudai wenming yanjiu*, 500 ("Ba Shu de Bashu" 巴蜀的巴蜀 and "Zhongguo de Ba Shu" 中國的巴蜀).
 11. Cf. Yang, "Lun Qian Shu de zhang'ai yu qi miwang de guanxi."
 12. *HYGZ* 3.191–194; *Shi ji*, 5.207, 70.2290.
 13. *HYGZ* 3.214; *Han shu*, 1.30.
 14. Charles Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier*, 8–10.
 15. *Jin shu*, 55.1516.
 16. *Shu jing lu*, 184.
 17. Kapp, *Szechwan and the Chinese Republic* and Goodman, *Centre and Province in the People's Republic of China*.
 18. *HYGZ* 3.194; *Shi ji*, 5.210; Meng et al., *Sichuan gudai shigao*, 49–51.
 19. *HYGZ* 5.471–481 and Meng et al., *Sichuan gudai shigao*, 66–68.
 20. For the history of the Shu Kingdom, see *Sanguo zhi*, 32.871–33.904 and relevant chapters in *ZZTJ*, *HYGZ* and *Shu jian*; see also Farmer, *The Talent of Shu*, 45–73; John, "Zhuge Liang and the Northern Campaigns of 228–234"; Meng et al., *Sichuan gudai shigao*, 119–132; and Ma, chaps. 5, 7, and 10 in *Sanguo shi*.
 21. *HYGZ* 9.661–698; *Jin shu*, 121.3035–3052; Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, 87–210; and Yang, *Cheng-Han shilue*.
 22. For a brief history of Shu during this period, see Meng et al., *Sichuan gudai shigao*, 140–144; and Sichuan jianshi bianxie zu, comp., *Sichuan jianshi*, 73–78.
 23. *XTS* 1.5 and 78.3522 and *JTS* 1.5 and 60.2347.
 24. *XTS* 78.3522–3523 and *JTS* 60.2347–2348.
 25. Zhou, "Shannan dao zai Tangdai zhengquan anquan tixi zhong de zhuanlue diwei."
 26. Chen, *Tangdai zhengzhishi shulungao*, 130.
 27. *JTS* 41.1663–1664, 39.1528.
 28. *XTS* 37.959 and *JTS* 38.1384.
 29. Zhang, *Tang zhechongfu kao*, 12, 218–226.
 30. *XTS* 37.960 and *JTS* 38.1385.
 31. The two circuits of Jiannan were combined into one in 764 and were divided again in 766. Thereafter, only a few minor and temporary changes of this setting occurred in the rest of the Tang period. For a chronological accounting of the administrative settings of the West and East Jiannan, see *XTS* 67.1861–95 and 68.1897–1927 and *JTS* 41.1663–1664.

32. Peterson, "Corruption Unmasked: Yuan Chen's Investigations in Szechwan," 42.
33. *JTS* 140.3825 and *XTS* 67.1866. Note that the actual territories and administrations of the three circuits frequently changed during the Tang. For the detailed changes, see *XTS* 40.1034–1039, 41.1079–1092 and *JTS* 38.1388, 41.1664. The prefectures under the three circuits in 813 can be found in *Yuanhe junxian tuzhi*, 765–827, 841–868, and 557–577.
34. Feng, "Tangdai Jiannan dao de jingji zhuangkuang yu Li-Tang de xingwang guanxi," esp. 81–83. For the economy of Shu during the Tang times, see also Li, *Tangdai Sichuan jingji*.
35. Examples can be found in *CFYG* 486.33a (5820), 498.15a (5966) and *JTS* 111.3330.
36. Chen Zi'ang 陳子昂 (661–702), "Shang Shuchuan junshi shu" 上蜀川軍事疏, in *QTW* 211.2b (2133); see also *XTS* 107.4074; *JTS* 190B.5022–5023.
37. Wang, *Sui Tang Wudai shi*, 6 and Feng, "Tangdai Jiannan dao," 80.
38. *JTS* 8.170 and *XTS* 67.1862–1865.
39. Lu Qiu 盧求, "Chengdu ji xu" 成都記序, in *QTW* 744.14a (7703).
40. Zhang, review of *Quan Tang wen zhiguan congkao*, 498.
41. *ZZTJ* 237.7641.
42. *QTW* 71.15a (752) and 648.11a (6564).
43. Ren, "Tangchao qianqi zhengzhi zhong de Shannan Jiannan diqu," 75–78.
44. For the rebellion, see Pulleyblank, *The Background to the Rebellion of An Lu-shan*; Pulleyblank, "The An Lu-shan Rebellion," esp. 47–55.
45. For the establishment of commands and Jiedushi, see Twitchett, "Varied Patterns of Provincial Autonomy in the T'ang Dynasty," 90–109; Twitchett, "Hsüan-tsung (reign 712–756)," 362–370, 415–418, 426–427; Peterson, "Court and Province in Mid- and Late Tang," 474–510; and Pulleyblank, "The An Lu-shan Rebellion."
46. *JTX* 9.230 and *ZZTJ* 217.6940.
47. Song Jubai 宋居白, *Xingshu ji* 幸蜀記, quoted in Sima Guang, *Zizhi tongjian kaoyi* 資治通鑑考異 (*TJKY* hereafter), see *ZZTJ* 218.6975. Note that *TJKY* is a separated work by Sima Guang. In this book, I use the version punctuated and inserted in the *ZZTJ* published by Zhonghua shuju.
48. For the routes mentioned above, see Yan, "Tang Luogu dao kao"; Yan, "Tongdian suoji Hanzhong tong Qinchuan yidao kao"; and Yan, "Han Tang Bao-Xie dao kao," respectively. Note that water routes from the eastern Shu through Jiangling to North China were also frequently used by the Tang people. See Yan, "Tangdai Chengdu Jiangling jian Shujiang shuilu dao kao."

49. For the route by which Xuanzong fled to Shu, see Yan, "Han Tang Bao Xie dao kao," 133–134; and Okano, "Lu Tang Xuanzong ben Shu zhi tujing."
50. A good narrative of the story of Yang Yuhuan in English can be found in Levy, "The Career of Yang Kuei-Fei."
51. *XTS* 51.1357.
52. For the rebellions in the north during Dezong's reign and the mutiny that forced Dezong to flee, see *JTS* 12.337–345.
53. *XTS* 127.4445 and *JTS* 129.3608.
54. *Gushan bizhu*, 12.136.
55. Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, xi.
56. *Hou Han shu*, 86.2844.
57. Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 20–22 and Fang, ed., *Xinan tongshi*, 251–258.
58. *XTS* 43B.1137–1142 and You, *Yunnan difang yange shi*, 106, 118, and 122.
59. For the routes to the south, see Yan, "Tangdai Chengdu Qingxi Nanzhao dao yicheng kao" and "Tangdai Chengdu xinan bianqu dongxi jiaotong zhu luxian." For the roads between Sichuan and Tibet in the Tang, see Yan, "Tangdai Minshan xueling diqu jiaotong tukao."
60. *JTS* 38.1388.
61. For the history of Tibet and its relations with the Tang, see *JTS* 196.5219–5267; *XTS* 216.6071–6109; Shakabpa, *Tibet: A Political History*; Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*; Pan, *Son of Heaven*, 322–341; Pan, "The Sino-Tibetan Treaties in the Tang Dynasty"; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 24–40.
62. For the history of the Nanzhao and its relations with the Tang, see *XTS* 222.6267–6293 and *JTS* 197.5280–5285. See also Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*; Rui, "Nanzhao shilue"; and Stott, "The Expansion of the Nan-Chao Kingdom."
63. Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 14.
64. *XTS* 158.4934–4936; *JTS* 140.3822–3825, 196B.5256–5260 and 197.5281–5284; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 90–94.
65. *ZZTJ* 249.8078. Cf. Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 101–102, 105.
66. *ZZTJ* 252.8153; *XTS* 222.6282; *JTS* 197.5284, 163.4264; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 105–122.
67. *JTS* 174.4518–4519; *XTS* 180.5331–5332; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 123–126.
68. *XTS* 222B.6285–6289 and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 145–148.
69. *XTS* 222B.6284–90 and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 105–122, 145–153.

70. QTW 795.9a (8335).
71. JTS 10.261 and 111.3319; XTS 141.4655; and ZZTJ 222.7113–7114.
72. XTS 6.167 and ZZTJ 222.7130.
73. JTS 11.281–283, 287, 117.3397–3403 and XTS 144.4704–4706.
74. XTS 127.4445 and JTS 129.3607–3608.
75. ZZTJ 236.7620; XTS 158.4936–4937; JTS 140.3824–3826; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 102.
76. XTS 158.4938, 170.5161–5162 and JTS 14.414–415, 140.3826–3828, 151.4051.
77. Peterson, “The Restoration Completed: The Provincial Policy of Hsien-tsung”; Peterson, “Court and Province in Mid- and Late Tang,” esp. 522–551; and Peterson, “Corruption Unmasked,” 34–78.
78. For a good summary of the late Tang, see Somers, “The End of the T’ang.”
79. XTS 114.4199.
80. For a study of the eunuchs in the Tang dynasty, see Wang, *Tangdai huan-guan quanshi zhi yanjiu*; Wang, “Tangdai huanguan deshì de yuanyin jiqi dui dangshi zhengju de yingxiang zhi yanjiu”; and Rideout, “The Rise of the Eunuchs in the T’ang Dynasty.”
81. BMSY 4.75; Tian Lingzi’s biography in XTS 208.5884–5889; and JTS 184.4771–4772. See also Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 715–716, 754–755.
82. Chen Jingxuan’s biography in XTS 224B.6406–6409. According to XTS (224B.6406, 208.5885) and ZZTJ (253.8221, 258.8418), Chen was the elder brother of Tian Lingzi. But some other sources say that he was latter’s younger brother. See XWDS 63.784 and JTS 184.4771.
83. ZZTJ 253.8222; BMSY 4.75; Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 749; and Liu, “Polo and Cultural Change,” 209.
84. JTS 19B.708–711 and Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 745–748.

CHAPTER 2

1. *Quan Song ci*, 1961.
2. ZZTJ 256.8314; JWDS 136.1815; XWDS 63.783; XTS 208.5887; and JGZ 6.13b.
3. Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 762–766.
4. *Ibid.*, 682.
5. JWDS 136.1815; XWDS 63.783; and ZZTJ 256.8314.
6. The Circuit of Henan in the Tang period covered most of the current Henan and Shandong, the north of Anhui and Jiangsu provinces. For a discussion

of its significance during the Tang, see Twitchett, “Varied Patterns of Provincial Autonomy in the T’ang Dynasty,” 99–100. Its importance as a political center in Chinese history is examined in detail in Forges, *Cultural Centrality and Political Changes in Chinese History*.

7. For the Bian River Canal in the Tang dynasty, see Quan, *Tang Song diguo yu yunhe*.
8. For militarism in Hebei, Shandong and Henan after the An Lushan rebellion, see Pulleyblank, “The An Lu-shan Rebellion and the Origins of Chronic Militarism in Late T’ang China,” 33–60, esp. 47–55.
9. Pulleyblank, “The An Lu-shan Rebellion,” 52–53.
10. Ibid., 53. Note that the term “Henan” used by Pulleyblank in his article refers to the Henan *dao* as a whole.
11. Sources give three different places as Wang Jian’s hometown: (1) Wuyang of Xuzhou, see *XWDS* 64.783; *WGS* 1.9b; *JGZ* 6.1a; and *ZZTJ* 254.8252; (2) Xiangcheng 項城 of Chenzhou 陳州, see *CFYG* 219.17a–b (2629) and *JWDS* 136.1815; (3) only one source says that Jian’s ancestors were from Yanchen 鄆城 of Yingchuan 潁川, and later moved to Xiangcheng: see *STW* 1.2b. Actually, Xuzhou and Chenzhou bordered each other, and were both under the old Yingchuan Grand Prefecture 潁川郡, so it is more likely that Wang Jian’s family moved within this area—from Yancheng to Xiangcheng, and finally settled in Xuzhou, where Wang Jian was born. One of Wang Jian’s stepsons once confirmed his native place as “Ying-Xu 潁許.” See *CFYG* 427.15a (5089). Here I take the Wuyang of Xuzhou as Wang Jian’s birthplace, as most sources suggest, though I acknowledge that both Chenzhou and Xuzhou might have been in the scope of activity of Wang Jian in his youth. Wang Jian’s birth date, the eighth day of the second month of the inaugural year of Dazhong, can be inferred from Du Guangting’s records; see *G CJ* 4.18–19 (丁卯年甲戌乙亥人), 9.43–44 (歲當丁卯是臣元命之年) and 2.6–7 (起天漢元年二月八日). His birth year is also calculated from his animal sign, the “rabbit” (*tu* 兔), as mentioned by Qin Zaisi’s 秦再思 *Luozhong jiyi lu* 洛中記異錄, quoted in *Shuo fu*, 20.22b (1482). For his death year, see *XWDS* 63.790 and *JWDS* 136.1819.
12. *CFYG* 416.35b–36a.
13. *XWDS* 63.783.
14. Such a birth order in his clan can be speculated from the titles with which Wang Jian was addressed by his contemporaries, “Brother Eight” (“*ba xiong* 八兄” or “*ba ge* 八哥”). See *STW* 1.4b; *JWDS* 136.1817; *XWDS* 63.784; and *JLQJZ* 6.1a. A scholar suggests that the order “eighth” might be the age order of Wang Jian among the officers in the Eight Brigades of

- Zhongwu. See Xu, "Qian Shu Wang Jian qingshaonian shidao shenshi dexing kaobian." But this is not likely because he was continuously addressed as "Brother Eight" even after the brigades were dismissed. In fact, during Tang times, it was very common to address a man with his birth order in his entire clan. For example, Pei Shu 裴樞 was called "Pei Fourteenth" (Pei shisi 裴十四). See ZZTJ 265.8641. For Wang Jian's sister, see JGZ 6.5a.
15. See CFYG 219.17a–b (2629) and WGS 1.9b, respectively.
 16. ZZTJ 266.8685.
 17. XWDS 63.783.
 18. STW 1.3a; JGZ 7.22a; and *Wudai shi bu* (WDSB hereafter), 1.7a.
 19. Wang's intention to cover his obscure background and early disgraceful life can be seen clearly from his worry that people would know of the criminal deeds he committed at Xuzhou. See WDSB 1.7a–7b. For more discussion of Wang Jian's family background, see Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojiao*, 2 and Xu, "Qian Shu Wang Jian qingshaonian shidai shenshi dexing kaobian."
 20. Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 724.
 21. For the salt monopoly and the penalties against salt smuggling in the Tang, see XTS 54.1377–1381. For a discussion of salt smuggling in the late Tang, see Xi, *Huang Chao qiyi*, 3–4.
 22. CFYG 220.21a (2646).
 23. For the revolt led by Pang Xun 龐勳, see JTS 19a.663–670 and XTS 9.260–261. A detailed discussion can be found in Rotours, "La Révolte de P'ang Hiun."
 24. Huang Chao's biography in XTS 225b.6451–6464 and JTS 200b.5391–5398. For the rebellion of Huang Chao, a nice introduction in English is Levy, *Biography of Huang Ch'ao*, which provides a translation of Huang Chao's biography in XTS and other related information. A more comprehensive survey of the rebellion and its consequences can be found in Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 727–747, 756–762.
 25. For the backgrounds of the founding rulers of regional regimes, especially those of the southern states, see Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang*, 43–56 and Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms," 140–158.
 26. Wang Jian joined the army in or before 875, probably the last year when Du Shenquan governed Zhongwu, under whom Wang Jian was promoted. See STW 1.3a. For Du's tenure at Zhongwu, see Wu, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 258–259, 1331. Cf. Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojiao*, 4.
 27. CFYG 220.4a–b (2637). See also STW 1.3a; BMSY, quoted in *Wudai shiji zhu* 五代史記注, 63A.1a and *Taiping guangji* (TPGJ hereafter), 224.1723–1724. Chuhong's name is transcribed differently by the sources above,

“Chuhong 處洪” in *STW*, “Chuchang 處常” in *Wudai shi ji zhu*, “Chuhong 處弘” in *TPGJ*, and “Chuchang 處嘗” in *CFYG*.

28. It was in 756 that the area was first put under the control of a military governor of Huaixi 淮西; from that time until the Chen-Xu Command was established in 787, Chenzhou belonged to Zheng-Chen 鄭陳 in 759 and to Huaixi again in 761, and to Hua-Bo 滑亳 in 769, and Xuzhou was controlled by Yu-Xu-Ru 豫許汝 in 758 and Yicheng 義成 in 785. After the Chen-Xu Command was built, Yinzhou 潞州 and Caizhou 蔡州 were added in 817 and 818, respectively, but the former was dropped in 822. A few changes followed during and after the 880s. For a history of the commands in the Chen-Xu area, see *XTS* 65.1811–26 and Wu, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 1: 214–218, 241–264 and 2: 1252–1253.
29. *XTS* 65.1812.
30. For the size of Zhongwu army, see *Fanchuan wenji*, 8.78 (陳許無帥, 帝閑讌獨言曰, 勁兵三萬誰可付者). Another source even states the number as one hundred thousand. See *TPGJ* 430.3496 (忠武軍十萬, 豈無勇士) Although the astronomical figures given in these two sources, especially the second one, are not to be taken literally, the size of the Zhongwu army and its battle effectiveness can still be imagined. A comparison can be made between Chen-Xu and its neighboring command, Bian-Song 汴宋, whose army, a Japanese scholar has estimated, might have approached one hundred thousand men in the late eighth century. See Hori, “Hanchin shineigun no kenryoku kōzō,” 90. For a chart of the sizes of military forces in the various commands during the Tang, see Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang*, 44.
31. *JTS* 161.4219–4226 and *XTS* 171.5184–5188.
32. *XTS* 171.5187.
33. *STW* 1.3a.
34. *ZZTJ* 252.8182.
35. *Ibid.*, 252.8184.
36. *Ibid.*, 253.8193.
37. *ZZTJ* 253.8193 and *XTS* 114.4199.
38. *WGS* 1.9b and *STW* 1.3a. For the campaigns in Shandong and Jiangxi Wang Jian had participated in, see also *JGZ* 6.4b; *ZZTJ* 253.8202; and *JTS* 19.701.
39. *ZZTJ* 253.8232–8233 and *JTS* 19.708.
40. *ZZTJ* 254.8237. For Qin Zongquan’s biography, see *JTS* 200A.5398–5399 and *XTS* 225b.6464–6466.
41. *JWDS* 136.1815 and *STW* 1.3a. The post “Junyuhou” is also known as “Junhou 軍候” or “Du yuhou 都虞候.” For its responsibility in the Tang armies, see Yan, “Tang fangzhen shifu junjiang kao,” 264–269.

42. Yang's biography in *JTS* 184.4772–4774 and *XTS* 207.5875–5877. For his activities, see also Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 717.
43. *XWDS* 63.783; *ZZTJ* 254.8252; and *JTS* 184.4772–4774.
44. For the title "Yiyong," see *XTS* 208.5887 and *JGZ* 6.14b. For Jin Hui's biography, see *JGZ* 13a–14a; *SGCQ* 40.595–596 and Yan Juzhen 嚴居貞, "Da Shu...Jingong muzhiming bing xu" 大蜀。。。。。。晉公墓誌銘並序, in *Quan Tang wen bubian*, 11.1473–1476; for Li Shitai's biography, see *SGCQ* 40.596.
45. *JTS* 19B.711, 717, 184.4774 and 184.4774; *ZZTJ* 255.8298; and *XTS* 207.5877. For the remarkable role of the Zhongwu army in the campaigns, see *ZZTJ* 255.8293–8295.
46. *ZZTJ* 255.8300; *XWDS* 63.783; and *JTS* 19B.717–718.
47. *ZZTJ* 256.8314 and *JWDS* 15.203.
48. *JWDS* 136.1815; *ZZTJ* 256.8314; *JGZ* 6.13b and 6.14a; and *CFYG* 233.11b–12a (2774).
49. *ZZTJ* 256.8314 and *JWDS* 15.203. Note that *JGZ* (6.14a) says that it was Wang Jian who first sent a letter to the emperor to express his loyalty, and then received Xizong's edict. Here the official histories are followed.
50. *JWDS* 136.1815; *STW* 1.3a; *ZZTJ* 256.8314; *XWDS* 63.783; and *JTS* 19b.719.
51. *JWDS* 136.1815–1816; *ZZTJ* 256.8314; and *XWDS* 63.783. One source gives a different version of the attitude of Tian Lingzi to those officers, as follows: Tian did not treat Wang Jian and his fellows very well because of their previous relationships to Yang Fuguang, Tian's former rival at court. See *JTS* 19b.719. But as shown later, this description of the relations between Tian and Wang Jian was likely not true.
52. *JTS* 19B.719, 725; *XTS* 9.278; *XWDS* 63.783; and *ZZTJ* 256.8314–8316.
53. *JTS* 19B.720 and *ZZTJ* 256.8320.
54. *ZZTJ* 256.8321; *JTS* 19B.721; *XTS* 208.5885, 5887; and *CFYG* 667.6b–7a.
55. Wang Chongrong's biography in *JTS* 182.4695–4697.
56. *JTS* 19b.721–723, 182.4696 and 184.4771; *XTS* 208.5887–8; and *ZZTJ* 256.8321–8322, 8326–8330. See also Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 766–773.
57. For the Yidao and Bao-Xie Road in Tang times, see Yan, "Qinchuan yidao kao" and "Han Tang Bao-Xie dao kao" respectively. A summary of the routes taken by the Tang emperors to Hanzhong and Shu can be found in "Han Tang Bao-Xie dao kao," 133–135.
58. *XWDS* 63.783; *JWDS* 136.1816; and *STW* 1.3a.

59. *XWDS* 63.784; *STW* 1.3a–3b; *JTS* 19B.723 and *ZZTJ* 256.8330–8331.
60. *XWDS* 63.784; *STW* 1.3a–3b; and *ZZTJ* 256.8330–8331.
61. *JTS* 19B.723; *ZZTJ* 256.8331; *XTS* 208.5888; Yan, “Han Tang Bao-Xie dao kao,” 117–118, 135; and Yan, “Qinchuan yidao kao,” 45.
62. Yang Fugong’s biography in *JTS* 184.4773–4775 and *XTS* 208.5889–5892. See also Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 716–717.
63. *ZZTJ* 256.8334–8335, 8344 and *XTS* 208.5888; Cf. *JTS* 19B.723.
64. *ZZTJ* 256.8333 and *BMSY yuwen* 4.438. See also Yan, “Han Tang Bao Xie dao kao,” 130, 146.
65. *ZZTJ* 256.8335 and *STW* 1.3b. Sources vary on the office of Wang Jian at Lizhou: prefect (Cishi 刺史) in *ZZTJ* and commissioner of defense (Fangyushi 防禦使) in *STW*. Considering the fact that Wang Jian drove off the prefect of Lizhou later, the *STW* should be correct on this point. Both the *JWDS* (136.1816) and *XWDS* (63.784) say that his appointment at the time was as prefect of Bizhou 壁州, which was actually a symbolic appointment Wang Jian was given earlier. An examination of Wang Jian’s office at this moment can be found in *TJKY*, see also *ZZTJ* 257.8368–8369.
66. Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 18. For Lizhou’s strategic location, especially the section of the Jinniu Road, see Yan, “Tang Jinniu Chengdu dao yicheng kao,” 222–234.
67. *JGZ* 6.12a–13a.
68. Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jianjian*, 18.
69. *JGZ* 6.12a–b.
70. *JTS* 19B.725 and 727 and *XTS* 9.280.
71. *ZZTJ* 256.8346–7; *STW* 1.3b; *XWDS* 63.784; and *JWDS* 136.1816.
72. *ZZTJ* 256.8346–8347.
73. *Ibid.*, 256.8347. Their biographies are in *SGCQ* 40.10a–10b.
74. *STW* 1.3b. See also *ZZTJ* 257.8367; *JWDS* 136.1816; *XWDS* 63.784; and *JLQJZ* 5.1b.
75. *BMSY yuwen* 1.392 and *TPGJ* 177.1319–1320.
76. *ZZTJ* 254.8263.
77. *JTS* 19B.727 and *XTS* 224B.6407; For the text of the iron writ bestowed on Chen Jingxuan, see *Tang dazhaoling ji*, 64.61–67a; *Wenyuan yinghua*, 472.3a–4b; *Shuzhong guangji*, 69.6a–7a. For a discussion of iron writ of immunity in the Tang and Five Dynasties periods, see Davis, *Emperor and Bard: A Biography of Zhuangzong*, ch.3, 27n84 and *HR*, 619n3.
78. For the mutiny in Chengdu, see *XTS* 208.5885–5886; *ZZTJ* 254.8254–8255; for the subsequent revolts led by Qian Neng 阡能 and Han Xiusheng 韓秀昇, see *ZZTJ* 254.8263–4826, 255.8272–8273, 8278–8282, 8289,

- 8291–8293 and *XTS* 9.273, 275, 189.5471–5742. See also Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 749–750 and Meng et al, *Sichuan gudai shigao*, 172–174.
79. *ZZTJ* 255.8301–8302, 8305, 8308–8309 and 256.8310–8311 and *XTS* 9.275–276. Gao Renhou’s biography in *XTS* 189.5471–5473.
 80. Gu Yanlang’s biography in *XTS* 186.5431.
 81. *ZZTJ* 256.8347; *JWDS* 136.1816; *XTS* 186.5431; *XWDS* 63.784; and *STW* 1.3b.
 82. *JWDS* 136.1816 and *ZZTJ* 257.8367.
 83. *STW* 1.4a. A slightly different version of these words can also be found in *JWDS* 136.1816; *ZZTJ* 257.8367; and *XTS* 224b.6407.
 84. *ZZTJ* 257.8367–8369; *XWDS* 63.784; *JWDS* 136.1816–1817; and *JGZ* 6.6a, 6.7a, and 6.7b.
 85. *JLQJZ* 5.2a. See also another work with the same title by Zhang Jing 張青𪛗 quoted in *TJKY*, see *ZZTJ* 257.8368. Hereafter, I will use “Zhang’s *JLQJZ*” to distinguish his *JLQJZ* from Gou Yanqing’s work.
 86. *JLQJZ* 5.1b–2a; Zhang’s *JLQJZ*, quoted in *TJKY*, see *ZZTJ* 257.8368.
 87. *JGZ* 6.12b.
 88. *ZZTJ* 257.8369.
 89. *JGZ* 6.12b.
 90. *JWDS* 136.1816; *STW* 1.4a; *ZZTJ* 257.8369; and *XWDS* 63.784.
 91. The seeds of enmity between Zhaozong and Tian were planted in 881, when the prince was following the exiled court on the road to Shu; it is said that the powerful eunuch once drove the exhausted prince to move faster with a whip. For the anecdote, see *ZZTJ* 257.8379–8380 and *XTS* 208.5888.
 92. *XTS* 10.284 and *Tang dazhaoling ji*, 120.17a. Wei’s biography in *XTS* 185.5410–5411 and *JTS* 179.4653–4654.
 93. *JTS* 20A.736; *XTS* 10.284 and 224B.6407–6408; and *JLQJZ* 5.2a.
 94. *ZZTJ* 257.8382 and *XTS* 224b.6407–6408.
 95. *ZZTJ* 257.8383 and *XTS* 224B.6406–6407.
 96. *BMSY* 5.108.
 97. *BMSY yuwen* 1.387 and 3.412–413 and *SGCQ* 115.1715.
 98. *BMSY* 5.108.
 99. The victories around Chengdu include one achieved by Wang Zongkan 王宗侃 and Zhang Jie 張劫 at Huanhuazhai 浣花寨, southwest of Chengdu, one by Li Jian 李簡 at Xipu 犀浦 in the west, and another by Wang Zongshu at Qiliqiao 七裏橋 in the north. See *JGZ* 6.7a, 6.10a, 6.15a, and 6.15a–b; for the victory at Xinfan, see *ZZTJ* 258.8385.
 100. *ZZTJ* 258.8392 and *XWDS* 63.784.

101. ZZTJ 258.8393.
102. ZZTJ 258.8405; JWDS 136.1817; XWDS 63.785; and XTS 10.285–286.
103. ZZTJ 258.8393, 8403, 8415; XTS 224B.6408–6409; JLQJZ 5.2b–4a; and *Shenxian ganyu zhuan*, 167.
104. ZZTJ 258.8412; XTS 224B.6408; *Tang dazhaoling ji*, 122.10a–12a; and QTW 91.1a–2b (947–948).
105. XWDS 63.785. Similar words are also found in ZZTJ 258.8414; JWDS 136.1817; XTS 185.5410; JTS 179.4653; and STW 1.4a–4b.
106. ZZTJ 258.8414; STW 1.4b; JLQJZ 5.3b; JWDS 136.1817; XWDS 63.785; and XTS 224B.6408.
107. HYGZ 2.114 and *Sanguo zhi*, 31.867.
108. JGZ 6.13a.
109. XTS 224B.6408 and Liu Shu 劉恕, *Shiguo jinian* 十國紀年, quoted in TJKY, see ZZTJ 258.8414.
110. ZZTJ 258.8415–8417 and XTS 224B.6408–6409.
111. XWDS 63.785. A slightly different version is found in JWDS 136.1817; STW 1.4b; ZZTJ 258.8417; and XTS 208.5889.
112. ZZTJ 258.8418; 259.8441–8442; JTS 20A.738, 184.4772; XTS 10.288, 208.5889 and 224B.6409; XWDS 63.785; JWDS 136.1818; STW 1.5a; and JLQJZ 5.4a–4b.
113. Somers, “The End of the T’ang,” 762–766, 773.
114. Biography in XWDS 40.429–433 and JWDS 132.1737–1740.
115. ZZTJ 258.8390–8391, 8395, 8419–8420.
116. XTS 158.4938, 170.5162.
117. ZZTJ 255.8289. For the water routes through East Chuan during the Tang, see Yan, “Tangdai Chengdu Jiangling jian Shuijiang shuilu dao kao”; “Tangdai sanxia shuiyun xiaoji”; and “Tianbao lizhi dao kao.”
118. ZZTJ 258.8419; XWDS 63.785; and XTS 10.285.
119. For their friendship, see ZZTJ 256.8347, 8367, 8379; JWDS 136.1816; and XTS, 186.5431. According to XTS (186.5431) and JWDS (136.1816), they had established a marriage tie, but no detailed information is provided.
120. BMSY yiwen 1.387 and 3.412–413; SGCQ 115.1715; TPGJ 266.2091; and XTS 186.5432.
121. ZZTJ 258.8422 and XTS 186.5431. XWDS (63.785–786) records the name of Yang Shouhou as Chang Hou 常厚, which might have been his original name before he was adopted by Yang Fugong. See also *Wudai shiji zuanwu bu*, 4.75 (432).
122. ZZTJ 258.8422; XWDS 63.786; XTS 186.5431; and JGZ 6.10b.
123. ZZTJ 258.8422; XWDS 63.786, 794; and JGZ 6.11b.

124. ZZTJ 259.8424–8426, 8433; XTS 10.288; JTS 20A.748; XWDS 40.429–430; and JWDS 132.1737–1738.
125. For a brief examination of Li's rise, see Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 36–38.
126. XTS 186.5431 and ZZTJ 259.8438. JWDS (136.1818) were mistaken about the collision occurring in late 891 because at that time, Li Maozhen had yet to penetrate into Shannan West.
127. ZZTJ 259.8438 and JGZ 6.6a.
128. ZZTJ 259.8438 and JWDS 136.1818.
129. ZZTJ 257.8377.
130. JLQJZ 5.4a. Based on the context, the date given by JLQJZ, the tenth month in the inaugural year of Dashun, is incorrect. It should be the second year of Dashun (891).
131. ZZTJ 259.8425 and JGZ 6.15b.
132. ZZTJ 259.8427–8428 and JGZ 6.6a.
133. ZZTJ 259.8428–8429.
134. Franke, "Siege and Defense of Towns in Medieval China," 151–152.
135. For the career of Yang Sheng, see ZZTJ 256.8330–8331, 8382; XTS 186.5430; BMSY 5.106; and JLQJZ 5.2a.
136. Zhang's JLQJZ, quoted in TJKY, see ZZTJ 259.8433.
137. BMSY 5.106; See also XTS 186.5430.
138. Zhang's JLQJZ, quoted in TJKY, see ZZTJ 259.8433.
139. ZZTJ 259.8431 and Zhang's JLQJZ, quoted in TJKY, see ZZTJ 259.8433.
140. ZZTJ 259.8431–8433.
141. ZZTJ 259.8455; BMSY 5.106; XTS 186.5430–5431; JLQJZ 5.4b; and Xu *Tang shu*, 25.2b.
142. ZZTJ 259.8446–9 and Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 37.
143. ZZTJ, 259.8457.
144. Ibid.
145. ZZTJ 260.8469–8481.
146. QTW 91.10b–11a (952) and *Chengdu wenlei*, 16.8b–9a. Note that the former source gives the date of this edict as 894, but according to the latter, it should be sometime in the summer of 895, when Zhaozong stayed at Shimen 石門, a place near to Chang'an.
147. ZZTJ 260.8476 and XTS 186.5432.
148. ZZTJ 260.8480.
149. ZZTJ 260.8480 and XWDS, 63.786.
150. ZZTJ 260.8478–8480, 8482–8483 and XTS 10.292–293, 186.5432.

151. ZZTJ 260.8487–8488 and XWDS 63.786.
152. ZZTJ 260.8489–8493, 261.8497–8498, 8506. See also Wang Gungwu, *The Structure of Power*, 39–43.
153. ZZTJ 260.8492.
154. Ibid., 260.8496.
155. ZZTJ 261.8501–8502; XWDS 63.786; and XTS 10.294.
156. ZZTJ 261.8505; XWDS 63.786; and *Wudai shiji zuanwu bu*, 4.75.
157. JWDS 136.1818; JLQJZ 5.5a; XWDS 63.786; ZZTJ 261.8509; XTS 186.5432; and JGZ 6.10b.
158. Note that the so-called “Shannan West Circuit” in the late Tang did not cover exactly the same area as at earlier times, when it included fifteen prefectures (Liang, Yang, Ji, Bi, Wen, Tong, Ba, Xing, Feng, Li, Kai, Qu, Peng, Lang, and Guo). Its territory underwent frequent changes throughout the second half of the ninth century. The most influential change occurred after 885, when the court tried to reorganize the regional administrations, a policy perhaps designed by Yang Fugong. Some new commands were established in the old Shannan West and neighboring areas, including Wuding 武定 (seated in Yangzhou), Longjian 龍劍 (seated in Longzhou), and Ganyi 感義 (renamed as Zhaowu 昭武 in 897). All these commands and the shrinking Shannan West were controlled by Yang Fugong’s foster sons from the late 880s to the early 890s, but after 892, they were occupied by Li Maozhen, as mentioned earlier. Here I will still use the conventional term “Shannan West” to refer to the region that the old circuit administered without distinguishing the multiple commands to which the prefectures were subjected during this time. For the changes during the late Tang, see XTS 67.1890–1893.
159. ZZTJ 260.8478.
160. ZZTJ 260.8493, 264.8626 and JTS 20a.759.
161. For the power conflict in the capital during this period, see ZZTJ 262.8530–8531, 8533, 8538–8547, 8552–8558 and BMSY 17.321–322.
162. ZZTJ 262.8558–8563.
163. For example, Weibo Command once joined Zhu Wen against Li Keyong in the late 890s, and Liu Rengong’s 劉仁恭 (d. 914) Yan was just defeated in 899. See ZZTJ 258.8411, 260.8483, 261.8515, 8524, and 8535.
164. ZZTJ 262.8565–8566.
165. ZZTJ 262.8565–8566; XWDS 63.786; JWDS 136.1818; and BMSY 15.291.
166. ZZTJ 8580–8581; XTS 10.299; and JGZ 6.4b, 6b, and 9a.
167. ZZTJ 263.8582, 8584; XWDS 63.786; and XTS 10.299. Note that Fengzhou at that moment was still under the control of Li Maozhen, due to

- its contiguity to his power base. It was not conquered by Wang Jian until 911. See *ZZTJ* 269.8798.
168. For the war between Zhu Wen and Li Maozhen and its consequences, see *ZZTJ* 263.8574–8576, 8578, 8580–8582, 8584–8595, 8601–8603; *JTS* 20A.773–776; and *JWDS* 132.1739–1740.
 169. *ZZTJ* 256.8347.
 170. *QTW* 92.3a (958) and *Chengdu wenlei*, 16.9a–b. Although a scholar has suggested that this edict was issued by Xizong during his journey to Xingyuan in 886, I follow the *Chengdu wenlei* in holding that it was written by Zhaozong in 901, when he promoted Wang Jian as prince of Xiping. See Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 15.
 171. *STW* 1.5a.
 172. For the titles conferred on Wang Jian, see *ZZTJ* 259.8439 and 262.8529 and *STW* 1.5a. For the conferral of Zhu Wen title, prince of Dongping, see *ZZTJ* 262.8545.
 173. *ZZTJ* 264.8613 and *JGZ* 1.5a.

CHAPTER 3

1. *Quan Song ci*, 1961.
2. According to *ZZTJ*, eight thousand of the horses in the parade were owned by the state and four thousand were owned by civilians. Hu Sanxing 胡三省 (1230–1302), the authoritative commentator of *ZZTJ*, believes that all twelve thousand of the horses came from the Chengdu area and its neighboring prefectures. See 264.8607.
3. *ZZTJ* 264.8607. Note that there was another man named Wang Yin in the Five Dynasties period, whose biography can be found in *XWDS* (50.566–567).
4. There is an abundant literature on this topic, see, for example, Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 300–900; Lorge, *War, Politics and Society in Early Modern China*, 900–1795; and Graff and Hingham, eds., *A Military History of China*.
5. *XWDS* 27.297.
6. *JWDS* 98.1302.
7. The role of the military in the northern powers (especially the Later Liang and Later Tang) is discussed by Wang Gungwu in his *The Structure of Power*, 47–118 and Standen, “The Five Dynasties,” 39–74; for the significance of military predominance in the founding of the southern states, see Gu, *Zouxian nanfang*, 43–56 and Clark, 158–160.

8. *STW* 1.11b; *QTW* 129.11b (1292).
9. For military distribution in the early Tang, see Kang, *Tangdai qianqi de bianfang*, 149–150.
10. This can be seen from the major southern regimes built during the period, including the Southern Tang, Min, Southern Han, Jingnan, Chu and Wang Jian's Former Shu. One exception is Wu Yue, which was built by Qian Liu, a native of Zhejiang in south China, but many of his capable commanders were also from North China. For a discussion on this phenomenon, see Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang*, 47–49.
11. *BMSY* yiwen 2.406 and *SGCQ* 35.492.
12. For example, a military unit known as the “Demon Guards” (*gui bing* 鬼兵) led by Xu Yao 徐瑤, a native of Xuzhou, and a personal troop commanded by Wang Zongwo as the chief commissioner (Qincong du zhihuishi 親從都指揮使). See *STW* 1.10a and *ZZTJ* 258.8415–8416, respectively. One scholar believes the Demon Guards were the same unit as the Elite Dragoon, but I have some doubts about this. See Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*, 473. The personal army must have been expanded later by Wang Jian, as shown from a troop's title recorded in an epitaph, “Zuo qincong disan jun 左親從第三軍.” See Yan Juzhen, “Da Shu...Jingong muzhiming bing xu,” in *Quan Tang wen bubian*, 11.1475. For the personal armies of governors during the late Tang and Five Dynasties period (usually known as Yabing 牙兵, Qincong jun 親從軍, Qinsui jun 親隨軍, or Qinwei jun 親衛軍, etc.), see Sudō, “Gōdai Setsudoshi no Yagun ni Kansuru ichi Kōsatsu; Hori, “Hanchin shineigun no kenryoku kōzō.”
13. Each of the Eight Brigades of Zhongwu troops that had followed Yang Fuguang contained one thousand men. As sources report, Wang Jian was joined during and after his entry into West Chuan by another three brigades, led by Zhang Zao, Jin Hui and Li Shitai, thus making an army consisting of four original brigades from Zhongwu, roughly four thousand troops. Zhang Zao joined Wang Jian in 887, Jin Hui led his men to aid him later during the campaign against East Chuan after 891, and Li Shitai had been appointed Prefect of Shuzhou 蜀州 (today's Chongqing 崇慶 of Sichuan province) before 896. See *JGZ* 6.14b, 6.13b, and *Luyi ji* (hereafter *LYJ*), 8.1552, respectively. For Jin Hui's military career, especially his participation in Wang Jian's Shu adventure, see his epitaph in *Quan Tang wen bubian*, 11.1473–1476, esp.1474. For Wang Jian's own brigade titled “Yiyong du 義勇都,” see Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*, 472.
14. Tong, *Gudai de Bashu*, 24 and Duan, *Bashu gudai wenming yanjiu*, 69, 80–81, 159 and 161.

15. *JTS* 190B.5023 and *XTS* 107.4074.
16. For example, as early as in 751, the government recruited many soldiers from the Central Plains to fight the Nanzhao and, in early 870, more than fourteen thousand soldiers from various commands, most of which were in the north, were called in to inner Shu. Four years later, upon receiving the alarm of another invasion from the Nanzhao, the court continued to summon many relieving troops from Hexi 河西 (northern Gansu province) and Hedong. See *ZZTJ* 216.6907, 252.8155, 8173 and *JTS* 19A.672–673.
17. *JTS* 174.4519; *XTS* 180.5331–5332 and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 107–109.
18. *XTS* 224.6393 and *ZZTJ* 252.8177–8178.
19. *XTS* 222B.6291.
20. *XTS* 208.5885 and *ZZTJ* 253.8213. Note that the title of “Huangtou jun” seemed to have existed earlier in the Tang, and was used to refer to the sharp Zhongwu troops sent to guard borders. See *XTS* 64.1785, 167.5120 and *JTS* 19B.715 and 200B.5396. On the history of this army, also see Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*, 470–471. The fame of the soldiers must have been well known in the late Tang, as in the case of Yang Xingmi of Huainan, who gave his newly recruited forces the same title. See *XTS* 188.5453. According to a modern scholar, Yang’s units were not actually recruited from Zhongwu and merely took its name. See Chen, *Dushu zhaji yiji*, 579.
21. *ZZTJ* 254.8247, 8253 and *XTS* 189.5471 and 224B.6407.
22. The number of troops in West Chuan was known to be fifty thousand in 855. See Lu Qiu, “Chengdu jixu,” in *QTW* 744.14b–15a (7703) (領州十四縣七十一戶百萬兵士五萬). In Gao Pian’s reign, sixty thousand troops were reported, including both the native Shu troops and the transferred forces. See *XTS* 224.6393. Though no exact number was given by the sources, the Shu army under Chen Jingxuan’s command should have been larger than before because a force of sixty thousand was said to be sent directly from Chengdu alone in 889 to resist Wang Jian. See *JGZ* 6.7a. As for the number of troops in East Chuan, a governor in the late Tang was said to have led an army of one hundred thousand men, including infantry and cavalry (*XTS* 222B.6289); a captured army of more than seventy thousand was reported when Wang Jian captured Zizhou of East Chuan (*JGZ* 6.6b and *ZZTJ* 261.8509); twenty thousand men surrendered in Suizhou in 897, and one thousand in Hezhou, as mentioned earlier. According to *XTS* (186.5432), when Wang Jian launched an attack on East Chuan in 895, the army he commanded was two hundred thousand. Though this huge number

is apparently exaggerated, it is certain that Wang Jian's forces must have expanded to a large size by incorporating the Shu army after seizing West Chuan.

23. According to *ZZTJ* (260.8479–8480 and 261.8509), thirty thousand infantry and five thousand cavalry surrendered in Xingyuan, and a Qi reinforcement of two thousand troops surrendered later; before 902, another two thousand troops surrendered at Tongzhou, following the regiments led by three prefects of Lang, Peng 蓬 (today's Yilong 儀隴 of Sichuan province), and Qu 渠 (today's Quxian of Sichuan province). Counting the troops who surrendered at some other important prefects, such as Yangzhou and Guozhou, the number of the army Wang Jian took over in the area cannot have been fewer than fifty thousand. This number does not include troops who surrendered from later than 915, when Qinzhou was conquered and another nine thousand troops of the Qi joined the Shu army. See *JJL* 4.7b.
24. *ZZTJ* 269.8807.
25. *XTS* 186.5428 and *ZZTJ* 265.8646.
26. *XWDS* 63.784; *ZZTJ* 256.8346; and *JGZ* 6.7b.
27. Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 728, 734, and 750–754; Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 231, 243–244; and Hino, *Tobatsu godaisho jieigunko*.
28. Li Deyu recruited and trained local Shu people as "xiongbian zidi 雄邊子弟," and another governor, Lu Yan 路岩 (d. 873) was also known to train local militias. See *XTS* 180.5332 and 184.5397. Under Gao Pian's reign, some military units which recruited local Shu men, called "tu jiang 突將," were established, but one scholar believes these forces should be regarded as regular troops. See *ZZTJ* 252.8154, 8177–8180 and Chen, *Dushu zhaji yiji*, 642.
29. For example, Yang Shili organized the militias in the eight prefectures of East Chuan to join his formal troops, all together one hundred fifty thousand, to attack West Chuan in 884. See *ZZTJ* 255.8302.
30. *ZZTJ* 257.8380.
31. *ZZTJ* 258.8395.
32. For Wei Junjing and his network of militias, see *BMSY* 4.69–70 and 4.87; *Yudi jisheng*, 161.6a (807), 7a (808); Hu Mi 胡密, "Wei Junjing jian Yongchang zhai ji" 韋君靖建永昌寨記, in *Shuzhong guangji*, 17.19b–22b and *Jinshi xubian*, 4:12.477–483; Kurihara, "Tōmatsu no dogōteki zaichi shiryoku nitsuite—Shisen no I Kunsei no baai"; Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 750; and von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes*, 40–44.
33. *ZZTJ* 261.8507–8508.

34. According to Hu Mi's "Wu Junjing jian Yongchang zhai ji," Wei led an army of more than twenty thousand troops in an expedition in 893. The total number of his troops and those of the other magnates should be larger.
35. This number is recorded by accounts in *ZZTJ* (267.8705) and *STW* (1.7b) of a military parade in 908.
36. *XWDS* 24.250. But both the *ZZTJ* (274.8946) and *JWDS* (33.460) give the number as only thirty thousand, which was apparently too small. One scholar believes that "Ouyang Xiu might have made a simple transcription error, and indeed, three hundred thousand men seem extraordinarily high, comparable to the size of armed forces for north China at the time." See Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, ch.4, 27n66.
37. More than a few historians have considered this problem in their works and tried to evaluate the numbers in Chinese historical writings with skepticism. For example, Richard Davis commented that "Numbers are assuredly exaggerated, partly for the usual reasons of strategic maneuvering and partly due to the Chinese historian's proclivity to round off numbers upwards, often by considerable leaps." See *Emperor and Bard*, ch. 2, 15. See also Bielenstein, *The Restoration of the Han Dynasty*, 61 and 63; Yang, "Numbers and Units in Chinese Economic History." But the opposite arguments exist too. David A. Graff, for example, argued that "Although some of the larger figures are suspect for various reasons, armies of one hundred thousand or more are not inherently implausible given China's very considerable demographic, material, and administrative resources." See Graff, *Medieval Chinese Warfare*, 9–10.
38. The population of Shu (Jiannan and Shannan West together) around the mid-eighth century reached 5,084,450. See Liang, *Zhongguo lidai hukou tiandi tianfu tongji*, 86.
39. A comparison between the Shu and the Liang in terms of the number of troops would be helpful here. According to *ZZTJ* (264.8606, 8611), Zhu Wen, perhaps the most powerful warlord of the time, once commanded an army of two hundred thousand in a military action in 903, but some of these troops seem to have belonged to his allies, such as the Weibo Command. According to a memorial by an advisor of the Later Tang recorded in *JWDS* (70.929), the size of the Liang army on the eve of its collapse was three hundred thousand, which seems to be much exaggerated. As for other southern states, such as the Min and Southern Tang, their armies might not have exceeded one hundred thousand. See Davis, "Images of the South in Ouyang Xiu's *Historical Records of the Five Dynasties*," 139–140, 140n46.

40. For the cavalry and management of military horses of the Tang, see Wang, “Tang chu zhi qibing,” 226–260; Song, “Tangdai de mazheng”; Ma and Wang, *Tangdai de mazheng*. For the cavalries of the Five Dynasties period, see Peers, *Imperial Chinese Armies (2) 590–1260 AD*, 18–19; Hino, “Godai no basei to tōji no babōeki”; Du, “Lun Wudai mazheng jiqi junshi zhengzhi de guanxi”; and Zheng, *Wudai shiguo shi yanjiu*, 67. Some warlords in the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods, such as Zhu Wen and Li Keyong, had developed great cavalry troops. For Zhu Wen, see *ZZTJ*, 264.8621 and Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 53 and 61; for Li Keyong, see *JTS* 19B.718 and Chen, *Dushu zhaji yiji*, 74.
41. Besides the Elite Dragoon, there were some other titles for his cavalry recorded by sources, such as “Xiaoqi du 驍騎都,” “Yunqi jun 雲騎軍” and “Changzhi majun 長直馬軍.” See *JGZ* 6.10a; *Quan Tang wen bubian*, 118.1475 and *SGCQ* 37.542. As for the origins of the horses, Wang Jian captured eight hundred steeds in East Chuan in 897, five thousand cavalry troops in the conquest of Xingyuan in 902, and more than three thousand horses from Qinzhou in 915. See *XTS* 186.5432, *ZZTJ* 263.8581 and *JJL* 4.7b, respectively. For his horse trades, see *ZZTJ* 264.8607. A large number of Shu cavalry troops was maintained until the regime’s fall; sources record that cavalry of Shu was stationed at Fengxiang and three thousand cavalry troops were inherited by the founder of Later Shu. See *SGCQ* 115.1712 and *ZZTJ* 275.8991, respectively. A detailed study of the Shu’s efforts in developing cavalries can be found in Hino, “Godai no basei to tōji no babōeki (IV),” 126–130. For a discussion of horse trades in English, see Smith, *Taxing Heaven’s Storehouse*, 204–229.
42. For the lack of horses in southern regimes, see Hino, “Godai no basei to tōji no babōeki (IV),” 115–126.
43. *JWDS* 61.816. Biography is also found in *XWDS* 46.511–512 and *SGCQ* 46.662–663.
44. *JLQJZ* 5.5b. The date recorded by this source is the second year of Tianfu (902), but according to *ZZTJ* (264.8613), the campaign in the gorges occurred one year later.
45. The name of “Feizhao du” is found in a stele inscription dated to 910. See “Zao Sansheng kan ji” 造三聖龕記, in *Baqiongshi jinshi buzheng*, *Sui Tang Wudai shike wenxian quanbian*, 1: 636. For “Polang du,” see *SGCQ* 43.629. For a survey of the navy during the Five Dynasties, see He, “Tangmo Wudai de shuijun he shuizhan,” 40–45; Zheng, *Wudai shiguo shi yanjiu*, 67–70. Yet their studies do not include the information about the navy of the Former Shu.

46. *GCJ* 1.2–3 and *QTW* 929.8a (9682).
47. For example, Li Jian was appointed as associate commander of the Yiyong Brigade (Yiyong du fu zhi bingmashi 義勇都副兵馬使), Zhang Zao as military deputy (Xingjun sima 行軍司馬), Wang Zongbi as senior officer (Shijiang 十將), and Wang Zongyao as left commander of the Weimeng Brigade (Zuo Weimeng du zhibingmashi 左威猛都知兵馬使). See *JGZ* 6.15a, 6.14b, 6.10a, 6.7b.
48. According to *JGZ* (6.6b), there were fifty-three such brigades in total by 897. For studies on the titles of Wang Jian's troops, see Du, "Qian/Hou Shu bingzhi chutan"; *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*, 470–477.
49. *BMSY* 5.112.
50. *ZZTJ* 260.8488.
51. There is rich literature on this topic. See, for example, Dai, "Tang Wudai jiazi zhidu de leixing jiqi xiangguan de wenti"; Hu, "Luetan Tangdai huan-guan lanshou jiazi de xianxian"; Lin, "Wudai haochi baonue yiyang zhi fengqi"; Kurihara, "Tō-Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo no seikaku"; and Kurihara, "Tōmatsu Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo ni okeru Seimei to Nenrei."
52. *ZZTJ* 255.8308, 266.8690. According to Hu Sanxing's commentary (*ZZTJ* 279.9107) Li Keyong adopted more than one hundred sons. Biographies of eight of them can be found in *XWDS* 36.385–396 and *JWDS* 52.701–711 and 53.713–722. For a discussion of Li Keyong's "jiazi," see Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 2, 2–3; Kurihara, "Tōmatsu Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo ni okeru Seimei to Nenrei," 64–67 (433–436), 75–79 (444–448).
53. *ZZTJ* 267.8728.
54. *XWDS* (44.480) indicates "the sons of Wang Jian use the characters 'zong' and 'cheng' 承 as names (建之諸子皆以宗承為名). From the sources, it is certain that "zong" was for his sons while the "cheng" was used for his grandsons. For a discussion, see *XWDS* 44.487–488, "Jiaokanji" 校勘記, 1. Actually, sharing the same characters in the given names among adopted children was a very common custom during the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods. See Kurihara, "Tōmatsu Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo ni okeru Seimei to Nenrei," 62–73 (431–442). Note that sources use different terms when mentioning Wang Jian's adoptions of different sons. For example Zongji was "taken as foster son"—"shou wei Yangzi 收為養子" (*JGZ* 6.4b) or "yang yi wei zi 養以為子" (*XWDS* 63.787); and Zongbi was "recorded as a foster son" ("lu wei Yangzi 錄為養子") (*XWDS* 63.794); but most other adopted sons, including Zonghan, Zongkan, Zongyao and Zongbo, Zongruan, Zongben, Zongwo, Zongmian, Zongxun, Zongjin,

Zongwan, Zongdi, Zongju and Zonglang, were just “bestowed names” (“*ci xingming*”), or ordered to “change names” (“*geng xingming*”). See *JGZ* 6.5a, 6b, 7a, 7b and 9a; *ZZTJ* 258.8416, 8419, 259.8455, 261.8504, 264.8619 and 265.8647. One special case is Zongfan, who was known to “assume the surname of Wang” (“*mao xing wang shi* 冒姓王氏”) at the age of ten after his mother married Wang Jian (*JGZ* 6.11b). The varying wording might reflect different relationships between these sons and their father, which has been pointed out by Dai Xianqun in “Tang Wudai jiazi zhidu de leixing,” 107–108. In my understanding, this “adoptive relationship” must have been very informal and, of course, very pragmatic, perhaps not bearing any of further responsibilities usual in the formal adoptions of the time, as Dai indicates. Interestingly, compared to Song historical sources, *SGCQ*, a later compilation, seems to be a little random in using words when mentioning adoptions. Here, too, I would not mark any difference between all Wang Jian’s adopted sons, and merely put them in the same group as listed above. For a study of adopted sons and their familial roles and responsibilities in the Tang–Song periods, see Niida, *Tō Sō Hōritsu Bunsho no kenkyu*, 511–542.

55. *JGZ* 6.7b.
56. *JGZ* 6.9b. Note that Zilu is the name of Confucius’ oldest disciple, a very brave man. See *Shi ji*, 67.2191–2194.
57. Biography in *JGZ* 6.5b–7a.
58. According to *ZZTJ* (259.8431–8433), Wang Xiancheng 王先成, the one who gave advice at Pengzhou on how to win the support of the local people, came to see Zongkan first because of his reputation for the greatest virtue among all four generals attacking the walled city, so that the advice would be relayed to Wang Jian and put into practice quickly.
59. For example, Zongkan and Zongyu held the office successively in the 900s. See *JGZ* 6.1b and 7b. Furthermore, as a son of Wang Jian’s clan, Zongsui was appointed as the commissioner of safety guards of the imperial tent (Yuyingshi 禦營使) in Wang Jian’s later expedition in Shannan. See *JGZ* 6.4a.
60. *JGZ* 6.10b.
61. In the southern regimes, for example, the Wang brothers of Min relied on the men of Guangzhou 光州 (today’s Xinyang of Henan province) and Yang Xingmi of Wu used many generals and advisors from Luzhou 廬州. See Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang*, 59–63. For the northern powers, the significant role played by the people from Daibei 代北 (northern Shanxi, western Hebei and middle Inner Mongolia) in the three Shatuo dynasties (the Later

Tang, Jin and Han) can be found in Fan, *Tangmo Wudai de Daibei jituan* and Fan, “Tangmo Wudai Daibei jituan de xingcheng he Shatuo wangchao de jianli.”

62. For a list of Wang Jians' adopted son, see appendix 3.
63. *JGZ* 6.14b.
64. Li Jian's biography in *JGZ* 6.15a–15b.
65. Besides the people mentioned above, the Xuzhou group also included Xu Yao (*STW* 1.9b–10a), Zhang Lin 張琳 (*ZZTJ* 254.8252), Qiwu Jian (*ZZTJ* 254.8347), Zhang Qianyu (*ZZTJ* 254.8347), Zhou Dequan 周德權 (*STW* 1.9a), and Meng Sigong 孟彥暉 (*JGZ* 7.22a–b). There were also some officials in the Former Shu hailing from Henan, such as Pan Kang 潘炕 (*STW* 1.10b). For a discussion of Wang Jian's use of fellow Xuzhou natives and other men from Henan, see Satake, *Tō Sō henkaku no chiikiteki kenkyū*, 484 and Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang*, 57–9.
66. Standen, *Unbounded Loyalty*, 112.
67. *ZZTJ* 258.8419.
68. The known men who surrendered to Wang Jian, as recorded by *ZZTJ*, included Shan Xingzhang (258.8392), Yang Ru (258.8393), Du Youqian 杜有遷 (258.8393), Hou Yuanchuo 侯元綽 (258.8393), Zhu Shi 朱實 (258.8395), Wen Wujian 文武堅 (258.8395), Xie Congben 謝從本 (258.8400), Ren Kezhi 任可知 (258.8405), Li Xingzhou 李行周 (258.8405), Zhao Zhang 趙章 (259.8455), Chang Zairong 常再榮 (259.8457), Li Jiyong 李繼雍 (260.8479), Fei Cun 費存 (260.8479), Chen Fan 陳璠 (260.8479), Li Yanzhao 李彥昭 (260.8480), Zhang Xiong 張雄 (260.8483), Xu Cun 許存 (260.8488), Wang Jianzhao 王建肇 (260.8488), Mou Chonghou 牟崇厚 (261.8502), Hou Shao 侯紹 (261.8509), Wang Renwei 王仁威 (261.8509), Li Jipu 李繼溥 (261.8509), Li Jimi 李繼密 (Wang Wanhong 王萬弘) (263.8581), Li Sijing 李思敬 (263.8582), Hou Ju 侯矩 (264.8619), Quan Shilang 全師朗 (265.8647), Li Yan'an 李彥安 (269.8798), Li Jichong 李繼崇 (269.8798), Liu Zhijun 劉知俊 (269.8798), Li Yande 李彥德 (269.8798; *SGCQ* 42.613–4), and Li Jiji 李繼岌 (Sang Hongzhi 桑弘志, 269.8807). There were also more than fifty Qi generals captured in the fall of Qinzhou in 915, but merely eight names are recorded. See *JJL* 4.7b.
69. *ZZTJ* 261.8502.
70. Biography in *JGZ* 8a–9b; see also *BMSY* 7.159 and *ZZTJ* 260.8487–8488, 261.8502, 8512, 263.8580, 269.8785.
71. *BMSY* 20.360–361 and *SGCQ* 38.561.
72. *ZZTJ* 263.8581 and *SGCQ* 42.613.
73. *JGZ* 6.12a.

74. *BMSY yuwen* 3.412–413.
75. *ZZTJ* 256.8346.
76. *ZZTJ* 258.8418; *JGZ* 6.15a; *XTS* 224B.6409; and *BMSY yuwen* 2.394. Note that Zhang Qing's name is transcribed as Zhang Jie 張劫 in *JGZ*.
77. *ZZTJ* 258.8416.
78. *XWDS* 63.790 and *ZZTJ* 269.8784.
79. Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 90.
80. *JWDS* 26.359; Li Keyong's tolerance with his men can also be found in *JWDS* 53.720 and *CFYG* 46.18b (528).
81. See, respectively, *ZZTJ*, 266.8676 and *Nan Tang jinshi*, 21b–22a.
82. *WDSB* 1.1b; see also Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 66–67.
83. *ZZTJ* 258.8393.
84. Wu, *Wudai shiguo tudi suoyouzhi yanjiu*, 139–140.
85. Song, "Shiguo difang xingzheng kao," 298.
86. *ZZTJ* 263.8580.
87. *JGZ* 6.10a.
88. *JGZ* 6.14b.
89. *JWDS* 136.1818.
90. *ZZTJ* 258.8420.
91. *Ibid.*, 260.8488.
92. *ZZTJ* 263.8581; *JGZ* 6.7a; Zhao Pu 趙朴, *Chengdu gujin ji* 成都古今記, quoted in *Shuo fu*, 4.8a–8b (283–284). Although sources do not provide the exact date of Hua Hong's execution, it is more likely to have happened in 902 or 903. For a discussion, see Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 70.
93. *JLQJZ* 5.10a–b.
94. *ZZTJ* 263.8580.
95. *SGCQ* 39.582.
96. For the parade, see *ZZTJ* 267.8705 and *STW* 1.7b. The observation is from Du Guangting, see *G CJ* 1.2–3 and *Q TW* 929.7b–8b (9682).

CHAPTER 4

1. *Quan Song ci*, 2157. Note the poem varies slightly in different collections.
2. *XWDS* 63.787; *ZZTJ* 266.8685; and *STW* 1.5a.
3. Worthy, "Diplomacy for Survival."
4. *ZZTJ* 264.8618.
5. the Liang and Qi's fights have been discussed in chapter 2; for the enmities between Zhu Wen and the other two governors, see *ZZTJ* 256.8306–8308, 8312–8313; 260.8485, 261.8509–8510, 265.8649–8650.

6. ZZTJ 264.8618, 8623–8631.
7. ZZTJ 264.8628–8629.
8. QTW 91.11a–12a (952–953) and *Chengdu wenlei*, 16.9b–10b; several sentences, though with modifications, can be also found in ZZTJ and TJKY. See ZZTJ 264.8628–8629.
9. For the first campaign, see ZZTJ 264.8628 and JWDS (136.1819); for the second one, see XTS 10.302; ZZTJ 265.8634; and XWDS 40.439.
10. ZZTJ 264.8628. For the practice during the Tang period, see Chen and Liu, eds., *Quan Tang wen zhiguan congkao*, 485–487.
11. Sun, *Tangdai xingjun zhidu yanjiu*, 211–212.
12. See ZZTJ 254.8246 and JTS 19B.711, 713 respectively.
13. ZZTJ 263.8584. Yang Xingmi received the authorization in spring 902, see ZZTJ 263.8573.
14. ZZTJ 266.8696.
15. Ibid., 264.8628.
16. XWDS 43.468–469. Note that elsewhere in the same work, Ouyang Xiu says, “Jian was not aware [of the change of reign title] due to the isolation from Tang, so the Shu still used Tianfu” (建與唐隔絕而不知, 故仍稱天復). See XWDS 63.787. Obviously, this explanation does not sound reasonable and thus is not followed here.
17. ZZTJ 8636–8637, 8640, 8643, 8652–8654; BMSY 15.294–298. For the last years of the Tang royal family, see also Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 82–84.
18. For this campaign and its consequences, see ZZTJ 265.8645, 8647, 8655, 8664. Before Shu’s occupation of Jinzhou, the governor there was Feng Xingxi 馮行襲 (d. 910), who seized the region in 891 and submitted to the Liang in 901. See ZZTJ 258.8422–8423 and 262.8565.
19. ZZTJ 265.8657; XTS 10.304; and XWDS 63.787.
20. XTS 10.305; JWDS 13.181–182; XWDS 40.439; and ZZTJ 265.8661–8663. The first three sources mention the participation of Wang Jian without giving an accurate number of the troops he dispatched.
21. ZZTJ 265.8658, 8663–5, 8668.
22. STW 1.5a.
23. ZZTJ 265.8662.
24. ZZTJ 265.8662. Hu Sanxing stated in his commentary that Li Sheng did not actually get the authorization from the court to practice the “*chengzhi*.” And this could be true, though Li Sheng was conferred some ministerial titles (Shangshu zuo puyi 尚書左僕射 and Tong zhongshu menxia pingzhangshi 同中書門下平章事), which might in some way justify his appointing

officials during the war. See *JTS* 83.3665–3666. For Zheng Tian’s case, see *ZZTJ* 254.8247. Note that Wang Jian was not the only one who used this “*xingtai*” during the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods. Ma Yin, a potentate in Hunan, also established such an institution to appoint officials, but it seems that he had obtained the authorization from the Liang court. See *JWDS* 133.1757.

25. *JGZ* 1.5a.
26. *ZZTJ* 265.8662.
27. *Ibid.*, 266.8669–8674.
28. *ZZTJ* (266.8675) says it was only the Shu that took “Tianfu” at the time. But, according to a stele inscription titled “Chongxiu Famen si tamiao ji” 重修法門寺塔廟記, “Tianfu” was still used in the region of Qi until at least 920 (天復二十年), and “Tianyou” had been applied in 922 (天佑十九年), the year to which the stele was dated. See *Jinshi cuibian*, in *Sui Tang Wudai shike wenxian quanbian*, 4:191–193. *JTS* (20B.811) also mistakenly states that Xichuan (Shu), together with Taiyuan (Jin), Youzhou (Yan), and Fengxiang (Qi) used “Tianyou” after 907. As for the Jin, they used Tianfu from 904 to 907, as mentioned before, but switched to Tianyou after the Tang were replaced by the Liang.
29. *ZZTJ* 266.8675.
30. A complete reply of Li Keyong can be found in *JWDS* 26.360–361; *CFYG* 7.21a–b (83); and *QTW* 103.2b–3b (1051).
31. *ZZTJ* 266.8685. The word “*tian yu bu qu*” is here referring to a famous epigram recorded by some ancient texts, in Chinese, “天予不取反受其咎,” which, according to *Han shu*, is originally from *Zhou shu* 周書. See *Han shu*, 39.2006. A similar expression can be also found in *Guo yu*, a pre-Qin historical record. See *Guo yu*, 21.7b (天予不取，反為之災). It was frequently quoted by later historians. For example, see *Shi ji*, 92.2624 (天與弗取，反受其咎，時至不行，反受其殃).
32. *ZZTJ* 266.8701 and *JWDS* 27.370, 132.1744.
33. *JWDS* 4.62. The victory of the Liang can be also found in *ZZTJ* 266.8701 and *XWDS* 2.16, 44.479.
34. *ZZTJ* 266.8701.
35. *XWDS* 5.41–42; *JWDS* 4.64–65, 27.370; *ZZTJ* 267.8704. Although *JWDS* (27.370) indicates the joint attack of the three powers on Chang’an was “large-scale” (三鎮複大舉攻長安), this might not be taken seriously given the previous discussion.
36. *ZZTJ* 267.8714–8716 and Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 122–123.
37. *ZZTJ* 267.8728–8732, 8735–8736, 8738, 268.8750, 8754, 8756–8757.

38. *ZZTJ* 259.8438. Note that *BMSY* (16.302) also records Zheng Xu's visit, but puts it after the mission of another envoy (Pan Wan 潘珙) in "the beginning of Liang Taizu's taking the governorship of four commands" (梁太祖初兼四鎮). This sequence of envoys seems problematic because it was in 901 that Zhu Wen was appointed governor of the four commands, a time much later than Zheng Xu's visit as recorded by *ZZTJ*.
39. *ZZTJ* 262.8565.
40. *ZZTJ* 264.8607 and *JTS* 20A.777. Note *BMSY* (15.291) gives a different account in which the Shu envoy (Wei Zhuang) was dispatched before the retreat of the Liang army from Fengxiang, whose mission was not to develop a relationship with the Liang but to announce the Shu's new policy to support the Qi. As a result, this altered attitude exasperated Zhu Wen and broke relations between the two sides. Because this consequence conflicts with the following events, I would follow the record of *ZZTJ*, though believing Wei Zhuang was the envoy in 903.
41. *QTW* 92.14a–21b (963–967).
42. *ZZTJ* 265.8652. Another source *STW* (1.8b) also records the mission but mistakenly dates it to 907, after the ascendance of Zhu Wen, and does not provide the envoy's name.
43. *STW* 1.8b. A slightly varied version can also be found in *ZZTJ* 265.8652 and *QTW* 889.4a–b (9288).
44. This contact can be inferred from the lines recorded in Zhu Wen's letter in 912. See *JLQJZ* 6.1b (去歲密聞風旨。。。。。。遂委永平軍節度使劉鄩，特遣行人，先道深意).
45. *ZZTJ* 268.8751; *XWDS* 2.20, 63.788–789. The mission was sent out in the second month and arrived in the fifth, as shown in the records of *XWDS*. Note that *JLQJZ* (6.1a–4a) mistakenly places the mission in the third year of Wucheng (910).
46. *JLQJZ* 6.1a–4a; *QTW* 102.5b–8a (1042–1044); *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 28.15b–17a; and *Chengdu wenlei* 19.10b–12a.
47. *JLQJZ* 6.1a–4a; *QTW* 102.5b–8a (1042–1044); *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 28.15b–17a; and *Chengdu wenlei* 19.10b–12a. Note that the detailed list of gifts was omitted in both the *Quan Shu yiwenzhi* and *Chengdu wenlei*.
48. *JLQJZ* 6.4a; *QTW* 102.8a (1044); *Chengdu wenlei*, 19.12a; and *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 28.17a.
49. *STW* 1.8b (此神堯驕李密之意也). Note that *STW* mistakenly attributes this comment to Wei Zhuang, who had died two years before the arrival of the Liang envoy. It should be Zhang Ge, the minister at the time, who made such a comment. For an analysis, see Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*,

- 104 and Xia Chengtao's "Wei Duanji nianpu," 29–30. For the historical allusion mentioned here, which is about the relations of Gaozu, founding emperor of the Tang (Shenyao 神堯), and the powerful potentate Li Mi in the late Sui, see *JTS* 53.2220–2221.
50. *XWDS* 63.788–789.
 51. *Ibid.*
 52. *QTW* 889.16a–17b (9294), 129.9b–11b (1291–1292); *JLQJZ* 6.4a–6a; *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 28.17a–19a; and *Chengdu wenlei*, 19.12a–14a.
 53. For a discussion of the importance of correct title usage in state letters, see Franke, "Sung Embassies: Some General Observations," 117–118.
 54. *STW* 1.11a and *SGCQ* 36.523. The date recorded by *STW* is the second year of Tongzheng, but there was only one year under the reign title, namely, the inaugural year (916). A correct version can be found in Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 139. The envoy's name in *STW* is not correct either. According to Wang Renyu 王仁裕, *Wangshi jianwen lu* 王氏見聞錄, quoted in *TPGJ* (257.2004), Feng Shunqing 封舜卿 was sent to Shu through Jinzhou, which was governed by Wang Zonglang. But this record does not provide an exact date. *SGCQ* takes Feng's mission as the one in 916, but Wang Wencai argued that it might have occurred in 902. See Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 118. Because Jinzhou was only controlled by the Shu in and after 905 and Zonglang's governorship could not be earlier than 908, I agree with *SGCQ* on this point and attribute the Liang mission of 916 to Feng Shunqing. For the Shu's campaign against Jinzhou and Zonglang's governorship, see *ZZTJ* 265.8647, 8655 and Zhu, *Wudai shiguo fangzhen nianbiao*, 105–106. Feng Shunqing's biography see *JWDS* 68.902–903. For Li Cunxu and the Jin's military success in 916, see *XWDS* 3.25–26.
 55. For the crisis experienced by the Liang after 912, see *ZZTJ* 268.8759–8763, 8765, 8768–8769, 8772, 8776–8778, 269.8779–8780, 8786–8797, 8800–8803.
 56. The designations of "sheng" (department) or "si" (bureau) indicate the status of the regime, the former for an "empire" or a kingdom, the latter for an autonomous command. As shown in *STW* (1.6b), when Wang Jian founded his empire in 907, he promoted his Kesi to Kesheng after ascending to the throne. The head of a Kesheng was called a Keshengshi 客省使, and the officer in charge of a Kesi under a command was known as a Kejiang 客將 (or Tongyinguan 通引官). For a study of this issue, see Wu, "Shilun wan Tang Wudai de kejiang kesi yu kesheng."
 57. *XWDS* 39.413.

58. *XWDS* 39.426 and *ZZTJ* 268.8746.
59. Wang, "The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire," 47.
60. For the swift fall of Yan, see *ZZTJ* 268.8777–8778; *XWDS* 39.426–427.
61. Worthy, "Diplomacy for Survival."
62. *STW* 1.7b.
63. This view had been shared by a number of later historians after the Song, who also listed the Qi as a "state" (*guo*) with the "ten states." For examples, see *Zizhi tongjian bu*, 13559 and *Lidai tongji biao*, 10.1a; *Wudai jinian biao*.
64. For Li's early career, see *XWDS* 40.429–433; *JWDS* 132. 1737–1740; *ZZTJ* 256.8338, 8357–8358, 8361; and *CFYG* 360.2b–3a (4267–4268). An English narrative on the background of Li Maozhen's appointment as Fengxiang governor can be found in Somers, "The End of the T'ang," 772–773.
65. Bai Juyi 白居易, "Lun Sun Shu zhang" 論孫璿狀, quoted from Wu, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 10. The five grand prefectures headed by Fengxiang were originally listed in *Shidao tu* 十道圖, a geographical text dated to 715. See *WDHY* 19.242 and *JWDS* 43.590.
66. For the imperial army that surrendered, see *ZZTJ* 259.8429; the use of militias can be seen from a campaign to resist the Shu at Qinzhou. See *JJL* 10.8a.
67. For Li Maozhen's adopted sons, see Kurihara, "Tōmatsu Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo ni okeru Seimei to Nenrei," 434–436.
68. *XWDS* 40.432; *ZZTJ* 266.8676; and *Xu Tang shu*, 22.3b.
69. For Li Maozhen's expansion during this period, see *ZZTJ* 259.8424–8426, 8433–8436, 261.8503, 8505, 8527; *XTS* 10.288; and *JWDS* 132.1737–8. According to *ZZTJ* (259.8450), by the end of 893, Li Maozhen dominated four commands in total (Fengxiang, Shannan West, Wuding, and Tianxiong), including fifteen prefectures. *XWDS* (40.432) gives twenty prefectures under Li's control at the height of his power.
70. Sources disagree greatly on the dates of the conferrals of Li's princely titles and other related issues. His first princely title, "Longxi junwang 隴西郡王," was awarded either in 887 or 890, according to *JWDS* (132.1737) and *XWDS* (40.429, 40.431–3), respectively. As for his two later titles, "Qi wang 岐王" and "Qin wang 秦王," *JTS* states the former was given earlier and followed by the latter in 893; both *JWDS* and *XWDS* mention that he was promoted to the former in the late 890s and was not granted the latter until 924 by Zhuangzong of Later Tang; similarly, *ZZTJ* (262.8546, 272.8905, and 273.8912–8915), though giving the date of the conferral of "Qi wang"

as 901, believes that Maozhen was promoted by Zhuangzong in 924 from King of Qi to Qin. Clearly most sources, except for *JTS* (20A.750), believe that “King of Qi” was the title Maozhen used in the early Five Dynasties period. Sima Guang even gives a short discussion on this confusing issue in his *TJKY*, arguing that the title “Qin wang” could not possibly be used before 924. See *ZZTJ* 273.8914–8915. But, from the edict preserved today which is titled “Li Maozhen feng Qi wang jia Shangshuling zhi” 李茂貞封岐王加尚書令制, it is clear that he was “still bestowed the Qi wang title” (仍封岐王) at the time of being given the Shangshuling office. See *QTW* 820.13a–14b (8640–8641) and *Wenyuan yinghua*, 451.11b–12b (2288–2289). Also, according to a stele inscription dated to 922, Maozhen had already assumed the “Qin wang” title before 924. So it is more likely that he was only granted the royal title of Qi by the Tang court, but he promoted himself to “Qin wang,” a more honorable title (Qin, as the old name, referred to a large state, while Qi merely covered a small region in the northwest), sometime before 924, in which year Zhuangzong again bestowed upon him the same title. For a more detailed discussion on this issue, see Wang Chang’s comment after the “Chongxiu Famen si tamiao ji” in *Jinshi cuibian*, 191–194; Wu, *Wudai shiji zuanwu bu*, 3.45–46 (424–425). A similar opinion is also found in Zhu, *Wudai shiguo fangzhen nianbiao*, 224n4.

71. *ZZTJ* 262.8545–8546. For the edict of this conferral, see *QTW* 820.13a–14b (8640–8641) and *Wenyuan yinghua*, 451.11b–12b (2288–2289). Again, the date of this conferral recorded in *XWDS* (40.431) and *JWDS* (132.1739) is different from that of *ZZTJ*. Note that Shangshuling, a title of great honor, was temporarily removed from the office list in 662, due to the reason mentioned above, and was only awarded twice later in the eighth century, once in 763 to Li Kuo 李適 (742–805), the crown prince of the day, and again in 781, to a meritorious general, Guo Ziyi 郭子儀 (697–781), who insisted on not taking the title due to its particularity. See *JTS*, 11.272–273 and 277, respectively. The unique symbolic importance of Shangshuling can also be seen in two cases in the turbulent era of the late Tang and early Five Dynasties periods: in 893, the court turned down the request of an overbearing governor for this title, and several years later after the fall of the Tang, Liu Shouguang, the potentate of Yan, still endeavored to acquire the title. See *ZZTJ* 259.8451, 268.8742.
72. Wang Renyu, *Yutang xianhua* 玉堂閒話, quoted in *TPGJ* 190.1426.
73. *ZZTJ* 263.8593, 264.8604.

74. ZZTJ 264.8609; CFYG 178.12b–13a (2141–2142). While Zhu Wen's highest civil title, Zhongshuling 中書令, was the third rank (正三品) in the early Tang's bureaucratic system, the title Shangshuling Maozhen had was the second (正二品). For the ranks of Tang bureaucracy, see Niida, *Tōryō shūi*, 103.
75. BMSY 16.302 and ZZTJ 259.8438.
76. QTW 889.2b–3a; a similar paragraph is also found in JJJ 4.6a–b and ZZTJ 265.8634.
77. ZZTJ 265.8634. Note that another source does not mention Feng Juan's role in this decision-making process, but only says Wang Jian directly contradicted his generals' opinion by giving a similar explanation. See JWDS 136.1819.
78. JJJ 4.6b. For the marriage alliance, see also ZZTJ 265.8634; XWDS 63.788 and SGCQ 38.569. Note that Jichong's name is here mistakenly recorded by ZZTJ as Jixun 繼勳, but from later accounts in ZZTJ as well as other sources, it should certainly be Jichong. See ZZTJ 267.8737, 268.8749, 269.8798 and JWDS 13.180. Also note that XWDS mistakes Jichong as a son (子) of Maozhen, but according to ZZTJ and JWDS, mentioned above, he should be Maozhen's nephew, “zhi 侄” (ZZTJ 265.8634), or “zongzi 從子” (ZZTJ 267.8737), or “youzi 猶子” (JWDS 13.180).
79. JJJ 4.6b–7a.
80. ZZTJ 265.8660.
81. Ibid., 266.8694.
82. Ibid., 266.8676.
83. Ibid., 267.8707–8708, 8712–8713.
84. Biography in XWDS 479–481; JWDS 13.178–180; CFYG 360.4b–5a (4268–4269) and 396.16b (3703). For his military merits in past years, see ZZTJ 265.8661–8664, 266.8691–8692, 8701 and 267.8704 and CFYG 386.14b–15a (4590–1). For the sobriquet “Wudi wang,” see JJJ 4.7b.
85. ZZTJ 267.8709–8712, 8715–8716, 8718–8719; Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 121–122.
86. ZZTJ 267.8725, 268.8741.
87. ZZTJ 267.8723. Note that ZZTJ says the two prefectures Li Maozhen begged for were Bazhou and Jianzhou, but considering their locations—both in inner Sichuan and far away from the borders, there was no reason for Li Maozhen to solicit them. So the prefectures mentioned here should be in Shannan West, as XWDS (63.788) indicates.
88. JJJ 4.7a; ZZTJ 267.8737.
89. XWDS 44.480, 63.788; ZZTJ 268.8740–8742, 8744–8749; JGZ 6.4a, 9b.

90. *XWDS* 63.788.
91. *ZZTJ* 268.8749 and *XWDS* 44.480.
92. *ZZTJ* 268.8764, 269.8785, 8796, 8798 and *JGZ* 6.2a.
93. *JJL* 4.7b and *ZZTJ* 269.8800. For Liu Zhijun's surrender, see *ZZTJ* 269.8798; *XWDS* 44.480. But note that Ouyang Xiu makes a mistake in the biography of Liu, which says Wang Jian sent him to occupy the Qin-Feng region. The sequence of the two events, the seizure of Qin-Feng and Liu's surrender, obviously conflicts with his own narrative in the "Qian Shu shijia" 前蜀世家 and that of *ZZTJ*. The same error can also be found in *CFYG* 438.23a–3b (5205). For a discussion on this problem of *XWDS*, see *Wudaishi zuanwu*, 2.29 (409).
94. *ZZTJ* 269.8799.
95. *ZZTJ* 269.8804, 8807. Some details of the war in 916 are mentioned in the biographies of Zonghan and Zongbo in *JGZ* 6.5b, 9b.
96. *ZZTJ* 270.8817, 8825.
97. *ZZTJ* 269.8785, 8788, 8799, 8808.
98. *XWDS* 40.432.
99. *ZZTJ* 270.8825.
100. Zeng, "Wudai Nanping shi santi."
101. For its geographical features and water routes, see Yan, "Tangdai Chengdu Jiangling jian Shujiang shuilu dao kao."
102. *XTS* 67.1870–94 and Wu, *Tang fangzhen nianbiao*, 679–706.
103. *QTW* 83.1b (865).
104. For the prosperity of Jiangling, see Weng, *Tang houqi zhengqu yu renkou*, 57.
105. *ZZTJ* 253.8224, 255.8271–8272, 256.8321, 8326, 8343.
106. *ZZTJ* 257.8378 and *JWDS* 17.229.
107. Biography in *JWDS* 17.229–230 and *XTS* 190.5483–5484; see also *ZZTJ* 256.8319, 257.8378.
108. For his expansion, see *ZZTJ* 260.8488 and *XTS* 190.5483–5484. Note that some accounts in *XTS* seem incorrect. For example, it says Kuizhou was controlled by Mao Xiang 毛湘, who was then dislodged by Cheng Rui's troops. But according to *ZZTJ* (258.8405), Mao, a pawn of Cheng Jingxuan, was actually the prefect of Qiongzhou, who died in 890 under Wang Jian's attack. If Mao's appointment was before 890, then Wang Jian's power should not have been extended to Zhongzhou at the time as *XTS* mentions.
109. *ZZTJ* 261.8502.
110. *ZZTJ*, 264.8607–8608; *JWDS* 17.230 and *XTS* 190.5484.

111. *ZZTJ* 264.8613, 8619.
112. *Ibid.*, 264.8619.
113. For the strategic geography of Kuizhou and Qutang Gorge, see Yan, "Tangdai Chengdu Jiangling jian Shujiang shuilu dao kao," 33–46.
114. Jingnan was occupied successively by Lei Yanwei 雷彦威, Lei Yangong 雷彦恭 and Zhao Kuangming during the period. For the power transition, see *JWDS* 133.1756–1757; *CFYG* 420.22a–b (5008), 438.22b (5204); *XTS* 186.5423; and *ZZTJ* 264.8608, 8621. Biographies of the Zhao brothers in *XWDS* 41.447–448; *JWDS* 17.234–235; and *XTS* 186.5427–5428.
115. *ZZTJ* 265.8533–8534. Actually, using iron chains to block the gorges as a means of withholding invasions along the Yangzi was used several times in history. See Yan, "Tangdai Chengdu Jiangling jian Shujiang shuilu dao kao," 34–35. According to a Ming historian, two huge iron poles were found at the Qutang gorge in his time, with characters carved on them saying "守關大將軍徐宗武," which, though they cannot be dated, were apparently for this military use. See *Yibu tanzi*, 2.3b.
116. *ZZTJ* 265.8643. It seems that a political marriage alliance was arranged between the two former rivals. See *ZZTJ* 265.8645.
117. *ZZTJ* 265.8645–8647, 8651; *JWDS* 17.235; *XWDS* 1.9–10, 69.856; *CFYG* 374.15a–b (4455); *XTS* 186.5428; Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 81.
118. *XWDS* 63.787; *ZZTJ* 265.8657.
119. Biography of Gao Jichang in *XWDS* 69.855–857; *JWDS* 133.1751–1752; *San Chu xinlu*, 3.1a–3a. For his management of Jiangling, wars against other regimes, and efforts for independence, see also *ZZTJ* 265.8647, 8663, 266.8680, 8683–8685, 8694, 267.8724, 268.8758, 8764, 8776–8777, 269.8815.
120. *ZZTJ* 266.8691.
121. *ZZTJ* 269.8782–3; *JGZ* 6.3a; and *JLQJZ* 6.6b.
122. *ZZTJ* 269.8783.
123. *Ibid.*, 269.8784.
124. For the Xiangzhou incidence of 909, see *ZZTJ* 267.8714–8716.
125. *BMSY yuwen buyi* 逸文補遺, 453.
126. For the fall of the Tibetan empire, see Beckwith, *The Tibetan Empire in Central Asia*, 143–172. On the relations of Tibet and Chinese regimes in the Five Dynasties period, see *XWDS* 74.913–915; *Xu Tang shu*, 70.3a–b and Petch, "Tibetan Relations with Sung China and With the Mongols," in *China among Equals*, 174–175.
127. FitzGerald, *The Southern Expansion of the Chinese People*, 57. For the relations of the Chinese powers and the southwestern non-Chinese

- peoples and their polities during the Five Dynasties period, see Liu, “Wudai shiguo zhengquan yu xinan shaoshu minzu de guanxi.”
128. According to *ZZTJ*, it was Gao Pian who first proposed the marriage alliance to the Nanzhao in 876, and in the following year the new ruler of the Nanzhao asked for an armistice, which was followed by a formal request of marriage in 879. See *ZZTJ* 252.8185–8186, 253.8190, 8204. For the following debate on the marriage and the its lack of result, see *ZZTJ* 253.8209, 8227–8228, 255.8273, 8297, 8300; *XTS* 222B.6290–6293; *XWDS* 74.921; *Xu Tang shu*, 70.5a–b; *Wudai huiyao*, 30.366; *BMSY* 11.235; *Nanzhao yeshi*, 154–155; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 153–158.
 129. *Nanzhao yeshi* 155–156 and *Dian zaiji*, 574; *XTS* 222B.6293.
 130. *ZZTJ* 261.8511–8512.
 131. Fang et al., *Xinan tongshi*, 297–304.
 132. *ZZTJ* 261.8512, 269.8786; *XTS* 222C.6323; *BMSY* *yiwen* 2, 395; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 158.
 133. For a history of Dachanghe state, see *Nanzhao yeshi*, 157–160 and *Dian zaiji*, 574–575.
 134. For this war, see *ZZTJ* 269.8785; *JGZ* 6.9b, 11b; *BMSY* 5.112-3; *JLQJZ* 6.6b; *Nanzhao yeshi*, 158–9; and Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 161.
 135. *ZZTJ* 261.8512, 269.8786 and *BMSY*, *yiwen* 2.395.
 136. *ZZTJ* 269.8786.
 137. *ZZTJ* 269.8785.
 138. *JLQJZ* 6.7a–b. For more economic and cultural interactions between the Shu and Yunnan during the Five Dynasties period, see Huang, “Cong wenwu kaogu cailiao kan Qian Shu/Hou Shu yu Nanzhao/Dali de jingji wenhua guanxi.”
 139. *JJL* 6.7a–b; *SGCQ* 47.673. Note that the records about Duan Yizong vary among sources. According to some accounts, he was a member of an embassy from the Nanzhao in the early 880s, who was then murdered by the Tang government following the advice of Gao Pian to weaken the power of the rival regime. But neither his name nor this murder is recorded in *ZZTJ* when mentioning the mission. See *XTS* 222B.6292–6293; *BMSY* 11.235; *Nanzhao yeshi*, 154–155; and *ZZTJ* 255.8297. It was said that, for a long time in the late Tang period, the kings of the Nanzhao had not paid enough respect to the Chinese envoys; to avoid such an “inappropriate” diplomatic occasion, which was surely believed by the Chinese to be a humiliation, the governor Gao Pian once sent a monk named Jingxian 景仙 as his envoy to the Nanzhao in the 860s, and, not surprisingly,

- the latter was treated respectfully by the host, due to the popularity of Buddhism in the area. See *ZZTJ* 252.8185–8186; *XTS* 222B.6290.
140. *ZZTJ* 274.8950; *XWDS* 65.812; and *Nanzhao yeshi*, 159.
 141. *XWDS* 74.921; *CFYG* 397.27b (4724); and *Xu Tang shu*, 70.5a–b. According to *Wudai huiyao* (30.366), Dachanghe state attempted to reestablish contacts with the Later Tang by leaving some gifts on the southern bank of the Dadu in 927. For a survey of the relations of the Later Tang and Yunnan powers, see Liu Fusheng, “Wudai shiguo zhengquan yu xinan shaoshu minzu de guanxi,” 94–96.
 142. *Xu Zizhi tongjian*, 43. Also see *Ming shi*, 311.8035. For the relations of the Song and the Dali, the new regime in Yunnan, see Fang Tie et al., *Xinan tongshi*, 241–244.
 143. Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom*, 159.
 144. *ZZTJ* 264.8607.
 145. *JLQJZ* 5.11a. For a detailed survey of the Xishan baguo, see Liu, “Yunan baguo bianxi: jiantan Bei Song yu Dali guo de guanxi.”
 146. Wang Jian’s application of this “*jimi*” policy can be seen in three appointment edicts preserved today, in which some native leaders were appointed as officials at a *jimi* prefecture known as Yuzhou 涪州 (in today’s Luzhou area) in the early 910s. See *Shu bei ji*, in *Shike shiliao xinbian* 3rd series, 16:325 (4.5a). See also *Yudi jisheng*, 166.1b (826).
 147. See *ZZTJ* 268.8756 and *JLQJZ* 6.6b, respectively.
 148. For example, the native peoples known as “Zangke man 牂牁蠻,” who dwelt in the *jimi* prefectures such as Fei 費, Zhuang 莊 and Zhen 珍 (all in inner Guizhou) established in the Tang times, “stopped connections with China due to Wang Jian’s occupation of West Chuan” (王建據西川, 由是不通中國) and the contacts did not resume until 927. See *Song huiyao jigao*, “*fanyi* 蕃夷,” 5.10 (7771); for the Zhangke people in the Five Dynasties, also see *Wudai huiyao*, 30.366–367.
 149. Sources record a “*tu gang* 圖綱” (transportation of massive goods) from Chu to Shu, implying that there were official business connections between the two regimes. But no details are known. See *WDSB* 3.8a–10a; *JWDS* 133.1760–1761; and *SGCQ* 53.779. According to *ZZTJ* (282.9207), in 939, the non-Chinese rebels on the Chu-Shu borders attempted to acquire military aid from the Shu (at this time, the Later Shu), but the Shu ruler turned down the request due to the distance. This unsuccessful contact again indicates that the Shu had no political or military interest in the Chu area.
 150. *ZZTJ* 271.8861.

CHAPTER 5

1. *Quan Song ci*, 2157. Note the poem varies slightly in different collections.
2. *G CJ* 1.2–3 and *Q TW* 929.7b–8b (9682).
3. *Shang shu*, 6.43–44.
4. *ZZTJ* 266.8672–8673.
5. *ZZTJ* 266.8672–8673 and *XWDS* 13.132–3; For Zhu Wen's background, see Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 26–8.
6. For a general survey of the efforts of the regional regimes of the Five Dynasties period to restore civil government and recruit literati, see Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*, 1–98. For a discussion of these issues specifically on the Later Liang and Later Tang, see Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 86–101; Fang, "The Price of the Orthodoxy"; and Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 70–72. On southern regimes, see Zhang, "Wudai wenhua de tuibian yu zhuanxing."
7. *ZZTJ* 266.8685.
8. *XWDS* 63.787.
9. *BMSY* 5.115–116.
10. Gao Jichang and Li Keyong can serve as examples here: the former relied on Liang Zhen 梁震, a literatus with the *jinshi* degree in the late Tang period, and the latter depended on his secretary Wang Jian 王緘. See *ZZTJ* 267.8705–8706 and *JWDS* 60.805–806. For a discussion of the responsibilities of the literati serving warlords of the day, see Cheng, "Guanyu Wudai mufu yingyong wenren."
11. Biography in *SGCQ* 40.589–591; *JJL* 4.3b–5a; *TPGJ* 257.2003. For a detailed discussion of his career under Wang Jian, see Zhang Hai, "Qian/Hou Shu zuojia kaolue," 67–72; Wu, *Tang Wudai wenshi congkao*, 238–239.
12. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 257.2003; *SGCQ* 115.1708.
13. *ZZTJ* 260.8488.
14. Biography in *STW* 1.8a–9a; *SGCQ* 40.592–594. The best modern scholarship on Wei Zhuang is Xia Chengtao's "Wei Duanji nianpu"; for a discussion on Wei Zhuang's visit to Shu, see Yang, "Cong Wei Zhuang de Shu zhong shici kan ta de liangci sixiang jubian."
15. *BMSY* 5.118–119; *SGCQ* 44.641.
16. *Nian'er shi zhaji*, 22.6a.
17. *BMSY* 7.159; *SGCQ* 44.641–642.
18. *JLQJZ* 5.9a; *Q TW* 129.5b (1289).
19. Sources only record one civil examination held in 921 under Wang Yan's reign. See *STW* 1.15a–b.

20. XWDS 63.787. For a general study of the migration of northerners during this period, see Wu, *Zhongguo yinmin shi*, vol. 3, chaps. 8–12; Tackett, “The Transformation of Medieval Elites,” chapter 4. For northern literati’s migration to Shu, see Liu, “Tang Song zhiji beiren qianshu yu Sichuan wenhua de fazhan”; Zou, “Tang Xizong shi qian Shu shizu jiqi rusong hou de jingkuang kaoxi”; and Gu, *Zouxiang nanfang*, 74–77.
21. STW 1.8b–9a.
22. Biography in SGCQ 45.653.
23. QTW 889.15b–16a (9293–9294). Biography in SGCQ 41.604–605.
24. QTW 890.8a–11a (9298–9300). Biography in SGCQ 41.605–608.
25. JLQJZ 5.12a; QTW 129.8b (1291).
26. XWDS 63.790. Some sources indicate that the hall was completed in 911. See *Chengdu wenlei*, 19.14b and *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 28.19b. The abundance of books in the Shu can also be seen from the fact that Mingzong of the Later Tang once sent officials to Shu to collect the veritable records of the Tang, which were not completely extant in North China at that time. See JWDS 37.5101.
27. ZZTJ 270.8826; *Xu Tang shu*, 25.3b. For an examination of the Shumishi in the Former Shu, see Jia Daquan and Zhou Yuansun, “Qian/Hou Shu de shumishi”; for a general survey of the office during the Five Dynasties period, see Dai, “Wudai de shumishi”; Zeng, “Tang houqi zhi Wudai zhi shumiyuan zhi yanbian luekao”; and Du, *Wudai shiguo zhidu yanjiu*, 117–137. For a comprehensive survey on the historical changes of Shumiyuan during the Tang–Song transition, see Li, *Tang Song biangeqi Shumiyuan yanjiu*.
28. Zhang Ge, Wang Kai, Mao Wenxi are examples of academicians who had great influence at the Shu court. Zhang and Mao’s biographies are to be found in SGCQ 41.602–604 and 41.609–610, respectively.
29. For a discussion of the limitations of Wang Jian’s efforts in building a civilian government, see Wang, “The Civil Pursuits of a Military Man in Tenth-Century China,” 28–32.
30. XWDS 63.787 and WDSB 1.7b–8a.
31. JWDS 135.1800 and XWDS 39.423.
32. Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 3, 58–60.
33. XWDS 62.767; ZZTJ 282.9198–9199; *Yuhu qinghua*, 9.164; and *Jiannan yeshi*, 1.153. For a discussion of Li Bian’s fabrication of his family origin, see Kurz, “The Yangzi in the Negotiations,” 29n3.
34. JLQJZ 5.6b; QTW 129.3a (1288).
35. For studies on this theory and its application during and after the Qin–Han period, see Li, *Xian Qin liang Han zhi yinyang wuxing xueshuo* and Gao, “Liu Bang de zhanshe qiye yu Li Yuan de jiang baiqi.”

36. *Luozhong jiyi lu*, quoted in *Shuo fu*, 20.22b–23a (1482–1483).
37. For the virtues of the Tang, see *CFYG* 4.12b–14b (45–46). Interestingly, Wang Jian was not the only one during the Five Dynasties period who claimed to succeed the Tang with “Metal Virtue.” For example, both the Later Liang in the north and the Wu in the south declared their virtues with the same calculation. See *JWDS* 3.50 and *ZZTJ* 270.8843, respectively.
38. *JLQJZ* 5.9b and *QTW* 129.6a (1290).
39. *ZZTJ* 264.8622–8623; *XWDS* 63.787; *JWDS* 71.944; *SGCQ* 41.602–604. Zhang Jun’s biography can be found in *JTS* 179.4657–4660 and *XTS* 185.5411–5414.
40. *BMSY* 20.369, 11.236; *SGCQ* 42.642. For more such recruitments, see *BMSY*, 6.141, 20.356, 359 and *yiwen* 1.389 and *SGCQ* 42.625.
41. Biography in *XTS* 207.5872 and *BMSY* 6.141, 10.225–226. There were some other eunuchs who also enjoyed Wang Jian’s protection. For example, Wang Congqi 王從玘, see *Shenxian ganyu zhuan*, 164–165.
42. *Shu bei ji*, 1.3b (313); *Sichuan jinshi zhi*, 58.14b (479). For the Chinese custom of using taboos on written characters to show respect, see Chen, *Shihui jǔli*.
43. Lei, “Lun Tangdai huangdi de tuxiang yu jisi.”
44. *XTS* 144.4705; *JTS* 117.3397, 3399; *ZZTJ* 224.7187.
45. *ZZTJ* 263.8584, 8702, 8762.
46. A large number of Tang palace painters took refuge in Shu during the Five Dynasties period, some having biographies in Song works. For example, Diao Guangyin 刁光胤 in *Yizhou minghua lu*, 2.3a–b; Teng Changyou 騰昌佑 in *Maoting kehua*, 8.4a–7a; and Zhao Yuande 趙元德 in *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 2.19a–b.
47. *Yizhou minghua lu*, 1.16b
48. *Tuhua jianwen zhi*, 2.5a–b and *Yizhou minghua lu*, 1.6a.
49. *XWDS* 63.792; *BMSY*, *yiwen* 1.389; *SGCQ* 44.652; *Qingxiang zaji*, 7.2a and; *WGGs* 1.12a. The Shu court also ordered the painting of the images of Tang emperors in the Daci Temple 大慈寺. See *Yizhou minghua lu* 3.6a and *SGCQ* 44.651–652. For Wang Zijin, see *Liexian zhuan*, 1.13b–14a.
50. There is a great deal of literature dealing with this topic. Here I list only a few: Kaltenmark, “Religion and Politics in the China of the Ch’in and the Han”; Lagerwey, “Daoism and Political Legitimacy,” in *Daoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, 253–264; and Wright, “The Formation of Sui Ideology, 581–604.”
51. Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 57–59, 258, 261–262.

52. For the early development of Daoism in Sichuan, see Duan, *Bashu gudai wenming yanjiu*, 147–157; for Daoism and the Cheng-Han state, see Kleeman, *Great Perfection*, 61–85; for the Tang patronage of Daoism, see Barrett, *Daoism under the T'ang*; Benn, “Religious Aspects of Emperor Hsuan-tsung’s Daoist Ideology”; Xiong, “Ritual Innovations and Daoism under Tang Xuanzong”; and Sun, “Tangdai Daojiao yu zhengzhi.”
53. Verellen, “Liturgy and Sovereignty: The Role of Daoist Ritual in the Foundation of the Shu Kingdom (907–925),” 61–62; Verellen, “A Forgotten T’ang Restoration: The Daoist Dispensation after Huang Ch’ao”; and Verellen, *Du Guangting (850–933): taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale*, 63–100.
54. *Yizhou minghua lu*, 1.7a–8b.
55. *SGCQ* 115.1704.
56. Biography in *WDSB* 1.11b–12b and *SGCQ* 47.674–676. For discussion of his early life, see also Luo, “Du Guangting liangdu ru Shu kao” and “Du Guangting shengping de jige wenti de kaozheng”; Wang, “Du Guangting shiji kaobian”; Verellen, *Du Guangting*; and Imaeda, “Tō Kōtei shōkō.” For writings by Du Guangting, see Luo, “Du Guangting zhushu kaobian” and Verellen, *Du Guangting*, appendix.
57. Verellen, “Liturgy and Sovereignty,” 60–62; Verellen, “Shu as Hallowed Land: Du Guangting’s Record of Marvels”; and Verellen, chaps. 3 and 4 in *Du Guangting*.
58. A prayer written by Du Guangting can be dated to the decade 894–904; see *G CJ* 6.10a. According to another writing of his, Wang Jian had sought advice from him as early as 896, by sending envoys to his abode in Qingcheng Mountain. See *LYJ* 8.1552. A nice account of Du’s service in the Former Shu is also found in Verellen, chap. 5 of *Du Guangting*.
59. *ZZTJ* 268.8773.
60. Verellen, “Liturgy and Sovereignty,” 63; see also *G CJ* 13.62–3, 14.63–64, 16.72.
61. Verellen, “Liturgy and Sovereignty,” 68–73; Many of Du’s Daoist prayer texts written for Former Shu dignitaries can be found in *G CJ*, *juan* 4–10.
62. *LYJ* 1506.
63. *G CJ* 2.9–10.
64. *LYJ* 4.1527; *Chengdu wenlei*, 18.21b–22a; and *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 27.21b–22a.
65. *G CJ* 2.7.
66. *XWDS* 63.792; *SGCQ* 44.652; *WGS* 1.12a; and *Yishan ji*, 35.19b.

67. *Zhaode xiansheng junzhai dushu zhi*, 3B.305. A modern collection based on Daoist sources includes only thirty-eight biographies. See Yan, comp., *Daojiao yanjiu ziliao*.
68. *LYJ* 2.1516. For a discussion of this story, see Verellen, "Liturgy and Sovereignty," 74–76.
69. *G CJ* 1.4.
70. *Ibid.*, 1.5, 3.12, and 2.10.
71. *G CJ* 6.30; Verellen, "Liturgy and Sovereignty," 71–73.
72. *G CJ* 1.3 and *Q TW* 929.7b–8b (9682).
73. *G CJ* 1.2.
74. For Guangting's official titles, see his "Xie'en chu Hubu shilang jian jia jie jue biao" 謝恩除戶部侍郎兼加階爵表, in *G CJ* 1.1–2. See also Luo, "Du Guangting huozeng shihao ziyi ji fengjue sushi jiepin kao" and Verellen, "Liturgy and Sovereignty," 64, 73–74.
75. *STW* 1.14b.
76. For the popularity of Buddhism in the Tang, see Weinstein, "Imperial Patronage in the Formation of T'ang Buddhism" and *Buddhism under the T'ang*. For the influence of Buddhism in the Five Dynasties, see Li, "Wudai shiguo fojiao yanjiu" and Cao, "Shilun Songdai fojiao shiji zai tangshi yanjiu shang de zhongyao jiazhi." For the patronage of Buddhism among the rulers of the northern regimes in the Five Dynasties, see also *CFYG* 52.11b–17b (581–584), 194.19a–20b (2344), 821.23a–25a (9760–9761); such popularity was also found in most of the ruling groups of the southern states, such as Xu Wen 徐溫 (862–927) of Wu, Wang Yanjun 王延鈞 (d. 935) of Min, and Ma Xiguang 馬希廣 (d.950) of Chu. See *WGGS* 1.5a–b, 2.6a and *San Chu xinlu*, 1.4b, respectively. For recent research on the revival of Buddhism in south China and patronage in the southern courts during the tenth century, see Benjamin Brose, "Buddhist Empire: Samgha-State Relations in Tenth-Century China."
77. *Yutang xianhua*, quoted in *TPGJ* 238.1837.
78. See *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 6.22b; *BMSY*, 3.57 and *QTS* 632.7246, 674.7710–7711, respectively.
79. *Yutang xianhua*, quoted in *TPGJ* 238.1837.
80. Yin and Zeng, "Sichuan Wudai shike kaocha ji."
81. *Wudai shiji zhu*, 63A.636.
82. *JLQJZ* 5.4b–5a; *SGCQ* 47.669.
83. Zujue 祖覺, "Songli Tang Liu Benzun zhuan bei" 宋立唐柳本尊傳碑, in *Jinshi yuan*, 6339–6341. For Liu Benzun, see also Hu, "Anyue Dazu Liu Benzun shilian tu tike he Song li 'Tang Liu jushi zhuan' bei de yanjiu";

- Chen, “Chongxin jiaobu Songke Tang Liu Benzun zhuan bei”; and Wang, “Liu Benzun yu Mijiao.”
84. ZZTJ 266.8687–8688.
 85. Sources record three state masters (*guoshi* 國師) at the court of Former Shu. See *JJL* 6.7a–b and *SGCQ* 47.673.
 86. *GCIJ* 2.10–11. There must have been more than one Indian monk visiting Shu in Wang Jian’s reign. A visit in 918 is clearly recorded by *JLQJZ* (6.7a). And sources also record another visit, which happened before 907. See *BMSY*, *yiwen* 2.405 and *SGCQ* 115.1703.
 87. *Song gaoseng zhuan*, 30.10b–12b and *SGCQ* 47.669–672. An English biography of Guanxiu can be found in Franke, ed., *Sung Biographies: Painters*, 55–61.
 88. *Xu Xiangshan yelu*, 73–74 and *SGCQ* 47.670. Some other sources, for example, *Song gaoseng zhuan*, believe Guanxiu was actually respected by Qian Liu very much; a modern scholar even avers that the anecdote about the submission of the poem is a fabrication. See Fu Xuancong 傅璿琮, preface to *Wudai shihua*, punctuated and collated by Li Zhenhua, 8–12.
 89. *WDSB* 1.13b and *SGCQ* 47.670.
 90. *CYJ* 20.43.
 91. Tanyu 曇域, “Chanyue ji houxu” 禪月集後序, in *CYJ* 53–54; For Guanxiu’s entering Shu and Wang Jian’s reception, see also *BMSY* 20.364–365; *JJL* 5.9b–10b; and Tian, “Lun Guanxiu yu Qian Shu Gaozu Wang Jian de jiaowang.”
 92. *CYJ* 19.41.
 93. *Ibid.*, 5.12, 16.35–36, 20.43.
 94. *Ibid.*, 19.41.
 95. For the “six items,” see Tian Daoying, “Lun Guanxiu yu Qian Shu Gaozu,” 71.
 96. *CYJ* 16.35–6.
 97. *Ibid.*, 19.41 (前生應是育王身; 憂民憂國契堯聰).
 98. *Ibid.*, 5.12.
 99. *Ibid.*
 100. *Ibid.*, 18.39.
 101. *STW* 1.9b.
 102. *STW* 1.9b and *JJL* 5.9b–10a.
 103. For an analysis of Guanxiu’s title (in eighty-nine characters), see Wang, “Guanxiu zhiguan kao.”
 104. Tanyu, “Chanyue ji houxu,” in *CYJ*, 54.

105. *Maoting kehua*, 2.2b–4b. For a history of Yuju hua, see Fan, “Yongqing yuan kao,” 96–97.
106. *ZZTJ* 262.8555–8556.
107. *BMSY* 12.252–253 and *SGCQ* 47.676.
108. *STW* 1.10a–b.
109. For a discussion of this religious pragmatism, see Wang, “The Adulators and the Adulated,” 94–96.
110. The best work on this subject is probably Kaneko Shūichi’s *Chūgoku kodai kōtei saishi no kenkyū*.
111. Liu, *Chunqiu Zuoshi zhuan jiu zhu*, 885.
112. For a history of suburban sacrifices, see Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 107–122.
113. *Han Shu*, 25B.1253–1254.
114. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 122. For more study of state rituals in the Tang, see Zhang, *Tangdai ciji lungao* and Kaneko, “Guanyu Tangdai houban de jiaosi he dishi zongmiao.”
115. For Zhu Wen and Li Cunxu’s uses of rituals, see Fang, “The Price of Orthodoxy,” 63–65, 73; for Liu Shouguang and Zhu Youzhen’s cases, see *ZZTJ* 268.8742–8743 and 270.8822. For a detailed record of the Later Tang’s adoption of rituals, see also also *Xu Tang shu*, 12.1a–9b. For a survey of the practices of sacrifices and other rituals in the Five Dynasties period, see also *CFYG* 593.10b–594.28b (7096–7118); *Gujin tushu jicheng*, 153.463–5; Geng, “Wudai sitian jizu li kaoshu” and “Liyue zhidu yu shiguo shiqi de nanfang wenhua”; and Wang, “Lizhi yanbian yu shiguo shiqi de nanfang shehui” and “Shiguo liyi zhidu kao,” esp. 1–12.
116. *ZZTJ* 266.8688 and *XWDS* 63.787.
117. *STW* 1.11b and *ZZTJ* 270.8821.
118. For the history and significance of reign name changing, see *Lidai jianyuan kao*, 7–12.
119. *ZZTJ* 267.8730, 268.8757, 8766, 269.8798–8799, 8807–8808, 270.8822–8823. Note the dates of some amnesties recorded by *XWDS* and *STW* vary from those offered by *ZZTJ*. For example, *XWDS* (63.790) says the reign name of “Tianhan” started in the tenth month, but *STW* (1.11b) records the start date as the eleventh month.
120. For the symbolic significance of calendar reform in imperial China, especially in the Tang period, see Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 212–223. For a survey of the calendars used by Chinese dynasties, including the five northern dynasties, see *Chunming tuichao lu*, 2.288.

121. For the Yongchang Calendar, see *ZZTJ* 267.8717; *XWDS* 63.788; *SGCQ* 36.510. For the Zhengxiang Calendar, see *SGCQ* 36.519, 45.653. For a discussion of the two calendars, see also Yang, *Qian Shu/Hou Shu shi*, 252–253.
122. *STW* 1.6b. *ZZTJ* (274.8955) records that “more than 200” musicians were submitted to the victorious ruler; *JWDS* (34.468) provides a more precise number of 298. For the development of court music in the Former Shu, see Qin Fangyu and Zhu, “Shilun Wang Jian mu yuewu shike de shixue jiazhi,” 276–281; Zhao, “Yongling dushu biji,” 266–269; and Yang, *Qian Shu/Hou Shu shi*, 247–250.
123. Lippiello, *Auspicious Omens and Miracles in Ancient China*; Eberhard, “Contributions to the Astronomy of the Han Period III”; Lipiello, “The Political Function of Astronomy and Astronomers in Han China”; Hinsch, “The Criticism of Powerful Women by Western Han Dynasty Portent Experts;” and Bielenstein, “An Interpretation of the Portents in the Ts’ien-Han-shu.”
124. Wechsler, *Offerings of Jade and Silk*, 55–77 and Ding, “Tang Gaozu/Taizong dui furui de yunyong jiqi dui Daojiao de taidu.” The Basic Annals of *JWDS* offer detailed records about the occurrences of portents during the Five Dynasties. See also *CFYG* 25.14b–20a (271–274), 202.21a–22b (2439) and *WDHY* 5.56–57.
125. *STW* 1.5a and *XWDS* 63.787.
126. *XWDS* gives a relatively detailed record of those reports, see *XWDS* 63.788–790; for the reports of dragons, see also *BMSY*, *yiwen* 4.429, 434–435, 438–439; *LYJ* 5.1532, *SGCQ* 115.1719.
127. *XWDS* 63.788; *LYJ* 5.1532; and *SGCQ* 36.511.
128. *XWDS* 63.795–796. For Ouyang’s view of Shu’s portents, see also Davis, “Images of the South,” 125–128. Despite Song historians’ negative judgment of these particular portents’ historicity, it might be assumed that such superstitions were more authentic expressions of the mentality of the age than later rationalizations. For example, superstitious means were widely accepted in political struggles in the Tang times, as a scholar has pointed out. See Tang, “Tang Xuanzong de douji yu Kai Tian chao zhengzhi.” Verellen expressed a similar view in his study of Du Guangting. See “A Forgotten T’ang Restoration,” 109–110.
129. For a general study of *chenwei*, see Dull, “A Historical Introduction to the Apocryphal (*Ch’an-wei*) Texts of the Han Dynasty” and Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Daoist Sacraments.”
130. *STW* 1.9a; for the prophesy, see also *QTW* 889.9a (9290) and *QTS* 875.9904.

131. *Luozhong jiyi lu*, quoted in *Shuo fu*, 20.22b–23a (1482–1483); *SGCQ* 35.501. Actually, according to *ZZTJ* (259.8460–8461), Dong Chang 董昌 (d. 896), a warlord of Zhejiang, had used the same prophecy to legitimize his usurpation; so the word seems to have been circulated before Wang Jian's occupation of Shu. In Chinese history there was a tradition of using animal signs to refer to people. See Boodberg, "Chinese Zoographic Names as Chronograms."
132. *STW* 1.9b; According to *XWDS* (63.788), an imperial seal of the Tang was found in the place; it seems the jade mentioned in *STW* was a different treasure. For the imperial seal found in Tian Lingzi's residence, see also Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 2, 77.
133. *STW* 1.9b; *XWDS* 63.789; and *WGS* 1.10a; for the details about the founding of the plate, see *GCJ* 4.18–19.
134. For a general survey on this topic, see Markus, *Buildings and Power* and Harbison, *The Built, the Unbuilt and the Unbuildable*. For Tang Chang'an, see Xiong, *Sui–Tang Chang'an*; Kiang, *Cities of Aristocrats and Bureaucrats*; and Wright, "Symbolism and Function."
135. For Wang Jian's construction of the city and palace, see Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 85–88; Yang, ed., *Tianfu Shudu*, 172–185; and Yan, "Tang Wudai shiqi zhi Chengdu." For the Dexian Gate, see *Maoting kehua*, 2.2b–4b. Wang Jian once accepted the submission of Yunnan captives at this gate in 915. See *ZZTJ* 269.8786. For a discussion of urban construction in the late Tang and Five Dynasties periods, see Guo, *Zhonghua gudu: Zhongguo gudai chengshi shi lunwenji*, 145–164.
136. *STW* 1.5b.
137. *XWDS* 63.789. Note that a pool with the similar name, "Long chi 龍池," existed in the Tang palace in Chang'an. See Hiraoka Takeo, *Tangdai de Chang'an yu Luoyang ditu*, 46 and 50.
138. *ZZTJ* 274.8943. For Shu's Wufeng Hall, see *Maoting kehua*, 2.2b–4b. Other similar names include Xuanwu Gate 玄武門, Wenming Palace 文明殿, and Chengqian Palace 承乾殿. For the names of Shu city and palace buildings and gates, see Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 86–87.
139. *XWDS* 63.790. For the Lingyan Hall of Tang, see *JTS* 3.54–55; *XTS* 2.41.
140. *CYJ* (*Siku quanshu* ed.), buyi 26.2a and *QTS* 837.9436.
141. Davis, "Images of the South," 97–157.
142. *Du Tongjian lun*, 28.605.
143. Wang, *Sui Tang Wudai shi*, 8–9.
144. *ZZTJ* 8434–5, 8460, 8702. For a general survey of the benign economic policies practiced by the northern regimes, see *CFYG* 70.18a–22b (792–794); 106.14a–17b (1269–1271).

145. Xi, *Huang Chao qiyi*, 39; see also *Rongzhai sanbi*, 10.3b–4a. Note that, while some historians, such as Fu Yiling, gave a high evaluation of Wen's contribution in the recovery of the northern economy, Hu Rulei argued that Zhu Wen's role should not be overrated and the credit should be given to the local commanders. But Hu admitted that there was a short period of economic recovery under the reign of Zhu Wen. About the debate, see Fu, "Guanyu Zhu Wen de pingjia" and Hu, "Guanyu Zhu Wen de pingjia wenti."
146. JWDS 136.1817; A similar comment can also be found in ZZTJ 257.8377. For a discussion of the ruling classes' efforts to restore the economy in the northern plains during the early Five Dynasties period, see Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 96–101.
147. JLQJZ 5.4b.
148. Ibid., 5.4a.
149. See JGZ 6.3a and Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 130–131, respectively.
150. *Lei shuo*, 12.10a–b; *Tangshi jishi*, 68.7b; and SGCQ 40.592.
151. ZZTJ 265. 8635 and JJJL 4.4a–b.
152. *Quan Shu yiwenzhi*, 55.9a; *Xu Tang shu*, 62.4b–5a; and SGCQ 42.618.
153. JLQJZ 5.6b.
154. JLQJZ 5.13a.
155. STW 1.8a and QTW 129.2a (1288).
156. QTW 129.2a (1288) and *Chengdu wenlei*, 16.10b–11a.
157. JGZ 6.14b and SGCQ 44.648.
158. BMSY 12.256.
159. For the state monopoly, see JLQJZ 5.7a. For the tea monopoly, see also *Luancheng ji*, 36.7b and Yang, *Qian Shu/Hou Shu shi*, 180; for Jingyanshi and the new prefecture, see LYJ 6.1542; TJKY in ZZTJ 275.8987; and SGCQ 36.519. See also Zheng, *Wudai shiguo shi yanjiu*, 207 and Yang, *Qian Shu/Hou Shu shi*, 191–192.
160. For examples, see BMSY yiwén 1.384 and XWDS 63.791.
161. WGGS 1.10b.
162. WGGS 1.10a–b.
163. WGGS 1.10b; SGCQ *juan* 36; Shi, "Shiguo huobi zhidu kao," 386–389; and Yang, *Qian Shu/Hou Shu shi*, 197–198; Hino, *Tō Godai no kahei to kinyū*, 427–428.
164. For the economy of the Shu during this period, see Yan, "Tang Wudai shiqi zhi Chengdu"; Lin, "Qian Shu/Hou Shu shangye de fazhan"; and Yang, *Qian/Shu/Hou Shu shi*, 174–210.

165. XWDS 68.847 and Schafer, *The Empire of Min*, 36.
166. Historical sources usually use the word “*Shu ren* 蜀人” (the Shu people) to refer to the Sichuanese of the day, a term implying they shared a similar regional identity. Such an identity can be seen from their conscious, broadly shared attitudes to the central regimes or to outsiders who went against the regional interest. For example, the Shu people greatly berated a Later Tang official because they believed it was he who led the Later Tang army into the region, and this attitude was used by Meng Zhixiang 孟知祥 to set up his own regime. See JWDS 136.1822–1823. In another case, the “Shu people” boycotted the edict of emperor Mingzong of the Later Tang when he ordered them to transport local taxes to the capital. See ZZTJ 275.8992. Sub-identities among the Shu people according to their home places existed, too. For example, the people of East Chuan and West Chuan often derided each other, as seen in a vivid example given by BMSY (yiwén, 3.410). Scholarly research on the issue of regional identities in premodern China is scarce. A brief discussion on “native identity” in the Yuan period can be found in Timothy Brook, “Native Identity under Alien Rule,” in Richard Britnell, ed., *Pragmatic Literacy, East and West, 1200–1330*, 235–245. For a discussion of the relationship of regional identity and state in modern China, see Finnane, “A Place in the Nation: Yangzhou and the Idle Talk Controversy of 1934” and Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation*.
167. *Song huiyao jigao*, “li” 禮, 20.24a (776) and JJJ 10.7a–8a. For Li Bing’s merits, see HYGZ 3.201–210.
168. BMSY 5.114 and JWDS 136.1819.
169. JLQJZ 5.10b–11a and STW 1.8a.
170. JLQJZ 5.10b. For the change of state title, see also ZZTJ 269.8808; XWDS 63.790; and STW 1.11b.
171. STW, 1.9b, 1.11b. It seems those temples were flourishing during the time and people frequently paid visits, as shown in the case of the temple for Zhang Fei. See SGCQ 115.1718.
172. SGCQ 44.651.
173. For a general discussion of the relation of history writing and power, see Plumb, *The Death of the Past*, esp. chap. 1 and Lewis, *History Remembered, Recovered, Invented*. For examples in Chinese history, see Chan, “Xie Jin (1369–1415) as Imperial Propagandist” and Maejima, “Seigi hatchūkoku no joretsu ni tsuite.”
174. Li, “Jiu Wudai shi er san shi.”
175. QTW 890.8b (9298).

176. In 927, Mingzong sent officials to Shu to collect history books. This suggests that the preservation of Tang sources by the Shu state must have been recognized by its contemporaries. *JWDS* 37.510; *CFYG* 50.17a (565); and *Xu Tang shu*, 19.1b.
177. *G CJ* 1.2.
178. *STW* 1.9b.
179. For example, Mao Wenxi's *Qian Shu Wangshi jishi* 前蜀王氏紀事. See Kurz, "A Survey," 218; Liu, *Song shi yiwenzhi shibu yijikao*, 860; and Zhang, *Wudai yiwenkao*, 47.8b.
180. For a discussion of the two works, see Wang Wencai, preface to *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 11–12.
181. *JWDS* 136.1816 and *XWDS* 63.784.
182. *JTS* 20A.736. For related records, see also *JTS* 19B.729, 179.4653; *XTS* 10.284 and *ZZTJ* 257.8367. Note that the dates recorded in the biography of Tian Lingzi in *JTS* and in the biographies of Chen Jingxuan and Tian Lingzi in *XTS* contain mistakes, too, which apparently conflict with the dates mentioned in the Basic Annals section. See *XTS* 224B.6407 and *JTS* 184.4772. According to *TJKY*, the errors in the first two biographies were copied from Shu records. See *ZZTJ* 257.368–369.
183. Zhang's *JLQJZ*, quoted in *TJKY*, see *ZZTJ* 257.8368.
184. *JLQJZ* 5.1b.
185. *Shiguo jinian*, quoted in *TJKY*, see *ZZTJ* 257.8368.
186. *Luozhong jiyi lu*, quoted in *Shuo fu*, 20.22b–23a (1482–1483).
187. *WDSB* 1.7a–b.
188. *STW* 1.21a.

CHAPTER 6

1. *QTS* 729.8355.
2. *ZZTJ* 269.8797–8 and *XWDS* 63.790. The accurate date of this fire, the twenty-seventh day of the tenth month (December 6) in 915, is recorded on a jade belt found in Wang Jian's tomb in Chengdu. For a discussion of the belt, see Zhang, ed., *Chengdu Yongling bowuguan*, 75–76.
3. *ZZTJ* 266.8685; *XWDS* 63.787; and *STW* 1.5a–5b.
4. Yang, "Lun Qian Shu de zhang'ai yu qi miewang de guanxi," 24–26.
5. *ZZTJ* 266.8689–8690.
6. *JJL* 4.4b–5a.
7. For the power distribution among ministers, academicians and other high officials in the southern regimes during the Five Dynasties, see

- Wen Yunjuan, “Shiguo zaixiang zhidu kao.” See also Zheng, *Wudai shiguo shi yanjiu*, 18–29. For the status of academicians in the Ming dynasty, see Struve, *The Southern Ming*, 8–9.
8. Wang Jian had actually adopted the strategy of control long before 907. In 899, he split the original territory of East Chuan into two commands, Dongchuan (seated in Zizhou) and Wuxin (seated in Suizhou). See *ZZTJ* 261.8517, 8525–8526. For a list of Shu governors and their tenures, see appendix 2. During the Five Dynasties period, such a strategy was widely adopted by rulers in both the north and south. See Song, “Shiguo difang xingzheng kao” and Wang, *The Structure of Power*, 123–124.
 9. *JGZ* 6.4b–5a.
 10. *XWDS* 63.787 and *JGZ* 6.5a.
 11. *QTW* 889.3a (9297) and *ZZTJ*, 266.8692–8693. For the request, see also *XWDS* 63.787 and *JGZ* 6.5a.
 12. *XWDS* 63.788; *ZZTJ* 267.8721; and *SGCQ* 46.659–660. For the biography of his father Tang Feng, see *SGCQ* 115.1711.
 13. *XWDS* 63.788.
 14. *ZZTJ* 266.8689, 8692–8693; *XWDS* 63.787–788; and *STW* 1.8a. Note that *ZZTJ* mistakenly puts the date of Zongji’s death in the third month of 908, but according to *STW* (1.7b), he attended the military review held in fall 908. So Zongji might not have been executed until late 908 or early 909. A Chinese scholar conjectures that Zongji was killed in the third month of 909. See Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 99–100.
 15. For studies on the succession crises in imperial China, especially in the Tang dynasty, see Eisenberg, “Installing an Heir” and Poe, “Imperial succession and Attendant Crisis in Dynastic China.”
 16. He, “Shi lun Wudai shiguo shiqi nanfang zhuguo zongshi neizheng de fasheng yuanyin” and He, “Wudai shiguo nanfang zhuguo de zongshi neizheng.”
 17. For Wang Jian’s sons, see *ZZTJ* 267.8727–8728; *XWDS* 63.791; and *STW* 1.7b–8a. A list can be found in table 3. Regarding Yuanying’s age, *XWDS* (63.789) says he was seventeen when selected as the heir apparent, the date of which, according to *ZZTJ* (266.8701), was the sixth month of 908. There is no record of the age of Zongren, Wang Jian’s eldest son.
 18. About the ages of Zongkan, Zongbo and Zongyao, see *JGZ* 6.7b, 8a, 9b. See also Kurihara, “Tōmatsu Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo ni okeru Seimei to Nenrei,” 444. Note that Kurihara mistakenly puts Zongkan’s death in 918. Actually, according to *ZZTJ* (272.8888), Zongkan died in 923.
 19. *STW* 1.9b; *JJL* 5.9b–10a; and *QTS* 826.9305.

20. *ZZTJ* 266.8685.
21. *XWDS* 63.788; *ZZTJ* 266.8701; and *STW* 1.7b.
22. *ZZTJ* 268.8773; *XWDS* 63.789; and *BMSY*, *yiwen* 4.443.
23. *QTW* 929.7b (9682).
24. *ZZTJ* 267.8715 and *XWDS* 63.789.
25. *ZZTJ* 268.8742, 8747.
26. *ZZTJ* 268.8760; *XWDS* 63.789; *STW* 1.19b; and *WGGS* 1.10a. Wang Jian had changed Zongyi's name to Yuantan in 910. See *ZZTJ* 267.8727.
27. *QTW* 129.12a (1293).
28. *XWDS* 63.789.
29. *ZZTJ* 267.8721 and Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 120.
30. *ZZTJ* 267.8721; *JJL* 5.4b–5a and *QTS* 8.77. Sources attribute this poem to Wang Jian, but considering his illiteracy, I speculate that it might have been composed by Wang Jian's secretaries on behalf of the emperor.
31. *ZZTJ* 268.8768.
32. *ZZTJ* 268.8773–8776; *XWDS* 63.789–790; *STW* 9b–10a; *JLQJZ* 6.6a.
33. *ZZTJ* 268.8775.
34. *STW* records nine consorts, omitting one, née Zhang, who is only mentioned by *ZZTJ* (267.8705). *JGZ* (6.11b) cites the “Ninth Madam” (九夫人) of Wang Jian as née Zhou, implying that Wang Jian had more concubines in his early days. Another consort, née Xiao 蕭, is said to have been bestowed on a surrendered general, and thus is not counted here. See *BMSY* 20.360–361 and *SGCQ* 38.561.
35. *ZZTJ* 267.8704; *JGZ* 6.11b; and *STW* 1.7b. Though *JGZ* says she was addressed as “Ninth Madam” earlier, official histories, like *XWDS* (63.791), hold that she was the formal wife (*zhengshi* 正室) of Wang Jian. Zhou's tomb was found in Chengdu recently. See Zhang, “Qian Shu Houfei mu yingwei Qian Shu Zhou Huanghou mu.”
36. *ZZTJ* 267.8705. Note that *STW* (1.7b) says Yuanying (Zongyi) was born of consort Bai 白. But considering consort Zhang's lofty Guifei title, *ZZTJ*'s record seems more reasonable. Thus, I have followed it here.
37. *STW* 1.20b. There are two points that need to be mentioned here: first, about the question of which of the Xu sisters gave birth to Wang Yan, both *XWDS* (63.791) and *ZZTJ* (267.8705, 268.8777), which I have followed here, note that the elder Xu (Concubine Virtuousness 賢妃) was Wang Yan's mother. This is followed by a later source, *SGCQ*. But *STW* (1.20b) and *JJL* (5.1a) claim that the younger Xu delivered Wang Yan. Second, as for the designation “Huarui furen,” most scholars believe that in Chinese history there existed three women who had the same title. See Wang, “Huarui furen shiji

bian” and Feng, “Baishou gongci qianjin jia.” According to Pu Jiangqing’s authoritative study, the extant collection titled *Huarui furen gongci* should be attributed to the younger Xu of Former Shu. See Pu, *Huarui furen gongci kaozheng*.

38. *JJL* 5.6a.
39. *ZZTJ* 268.8777; *XWDS* 63.791; *STW* 1.13a–b; and *BMSY yuwen*, 1.381.
40. *ZZTJ* 268.8777.
41. *STW* 1.10a; *XWDS* 63.791; *ZZTJ* 269.8781; and *QTW* 129.1b–2a (1287–1288). For Wang Yan’s adopted sons, see Kurihara, “Tōmatsu Gōdai no Kafushi teki Ketsugo ni okeru Seimei to Nenrei,” 441.
42. *ZZTJ* 270.8824.
43. *ZZTJ* 270.8824 and *BMSY yuwen buyi*, 462.
44. Lin, “Wudai junchen zhi yidan er zhengfeng duo tandu” and Lin, “Wudai haochi baonue yiyang zhi fengqi.”
45. Yang, “Lun Qian Shu de zhang’ai yu qi miewang de guanxi,” 26–28; Xie, “Lun Tang Wudai Song Shu zhong de shechi zhi feng.”
46. *BMSY* 4.92.
47. *BMSY, yuwen* 1.391.
48. *JGZ* 6.2a, 6.5a and 6.10a and *SGCQ* 115.1706.
49. *SGCQ* 115.1707–1708.
50. *BMSY yuwen* 1.391–392.
51. For Zongxian, see *JJL* 5.10b–11b and *SGCQ* 42.621; for Zong’an, see *BMSY yuwen* 1.385 and *SGCQ* 115.1707; for Zonghan, see *JGZ* 6.5a–5b; for Zongshou, see *JLQJZ* 6.6b.
52. *BMSY yuwen* 2.402 and *SGCQ* 42.626.
53. *BMSY* 12.256.
54. *WGGS* 1.10b.
55. The earliest version of this story is found in Yang Shi’s 楊湜 *Gujin cihua* 古今詞話, a work compiled in the Song period. Quoted in *Yuxuan lidai shiyu*, 113.13a–b. The Qing historian Wu Renchen adopted the story in the biography of Wei Zhuang (*SGCQ* 40.594). It is also accepted by some modern historians. See, for example, Yang, “Cong Wei Zhuang de Shu zhong shice kan ta de liangci sixiang jubian,” 220–221.
56. *STW* 1.10b.
57. *ZZTJ* 268.8777.
58. *Ibid.*, 270.8823.
59. *ZZTJ*, 270.8826; *XWDS* 63.790.
60. *ZZTJ* 270.8816–8817.
61. *CFYG* 231.21b (2754) and *XWDS* 44.480.

62. *ZZTJ* 269.8804.
63. *Ibid.*, 270.8821.
64. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 163.1187. See also *QTS* 878.9948. Note that the ballad is recorded slightly differently in the *XWDS* (44.480–1): “Ropes will be broken if the black bull is out of [the] sty” (黑牛出圈棕繩斷).
65. *XWDS* 44.480; *ZZTJ* 270.8821; and *BMSY* 4.70.
66. *ZZTJ* 270.8824.
67. *WGGs* 1.10b.
68. *ZZTJ* 270.8825. A slightly different version can be found in *STW* 1.11b–12a; *BMSY*, *yiwen buyi*, 462; and *QTW* 129.11b (1292).
69. *ZZTJ* 270.8825–8827; *XWDS* 63.790.
70. *BMSY* 10.224; *STW* 1.11b; and *JJL* 6.3b–4a.
71. *JJL* 6.3b–4a. For the poem composed by Gu Xiong, see also *QTS* 760.8635.
72. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 163.1187.
73. *JJL* 6.3b.
74. *CFYG* 224.6a–b (2676); *XWDS* 63.791; and *ZZTJ* 270.8826, 8836. For Yongling, see Feng, *Qian Shu Wang Jian mu fajue baogao*.
75. No source directly provides the birth year of Wang Yan, which can only be calculated based on accounts that mention his age. *STW* (1.22b) cites his age at twenty-eight *sui* at death in 926 (presumably born in 899). The same source, however, gives eighteen *sui* as his age upon his accession, which should make for a birth year of 901. Here I take 901 as Wang Yan’s birth year, following the latter account, since the same age can also be calculated based on *CFYG* 219.17b (2629), a work compiled earlier, which notes that Wang Yan was aged twenty-five *sui* when he surrendered in 925.
76. *ZZTJ* 270.8826–8827.
77. *JJL* 6.4a and *SGCQ* 44.643.
78. *SGCQ* 37.532. For Song Guangsi’s power at the Shu court, see also *JJL* 6.1a–2a.
79. *ZZTJ* 270.8834.
80. *Ibid.*, 270.8830.
81. *ZZTJ* 271.8856; *BMSY* 5.117; and *Nanbu xinshu*, 10.130.
82. *STW* 1.15a and *ZZTJ* 271.8856.
83. *ZZTJ* 270.8826; *XWDS* 63.791; *STW* 1.20b.
84. *XWDS* 63.791 and *SGCQ* 38.559.
85. *ZZTJ* 271.8861, 273.8928; *STW* 1.20b; and *JGZ* 6.7a.
86. *ZZTJ* 271.8855.
87. *Ibid.*, 270.8836.

88. For the civil-military relations of the Former Shu, see Wang, "The Civil Pursuits," 28–32.
89. *CFYG* 228.10b (2717); *XWDS* 63.791; and *SGCQ* 37.531. For *Yanhua ji*, see Zhang, *Wudai yiwen kao*, 321. For Wang Yan's extant compositions, six in total, see *QTS* 8.77–78.
90. *QTW bubian* 156.1907.
91. *STW* 1.20b. Some poems of the Xu sisters can be found in *QTS* 9.81–84.
92. *Huarui gongci jianzhu* and Pu, *Huarui furen gongci kaozheng*.
93. *STW* 1.20a–b; *XWDS* 63.792; *WGS* 1.11b–12a; *JJL* 5.1b–3b; and *ZZTJ* 270.8842.
94. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*; Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis."
95. For the Huajian school and their works, see Shields, *Crafting a Collection: The Cultural Contexts and Poetic Practice of the Huajian ji*; For the trend of literati writing in a feminine voice during the Tang, see Tung, *Fables for the Patriarchs*, 151–168.
96. *WGS* 1.11b–12a and *QTS* 889.10048.
97. *STW* 1.16a–b and *JJL* 7.3a.
98. *STW* 1.17a; *JJL* 7.2b; *XWDS* 63.792; and Schafer, "The early history of lead pigment and cosmetics in China," 426–427.
99. *ZZTJ* 270.8833.
100. *Ibid.*, 270.8845.
101. *JJL* 7.2b and *STW* 1.13b.
102. *QTW* 129.13a (1293).
103. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 241.1862–3 and *QTS* 8.77.
104. *ZZTJ* 270.8842, 271.8858.
105. Wang Zongbo's adopted son, for example, was inept and corrupt. See *BMSY* 12.256 and *SGCQ* 115.1713.
106. *BMSY* 20.361 and *SGCQ* 43.638.
107. *SGCQ* 45.654.
108. *ZZTJ* 273.8928.
109. *ZZTJ* 273.8926 and *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 241.1858.
110. Holmgren, "Politics of the Inner Court under the Hou-chu (Last Lord) of Northern Ch'i (ca. 565–73)."
111. He, "Wudai shiguo nanfang zhuguo de zongshi neizheng" and Davis, "Image of South."
112. Davis, "Image of South," 150.
113. *QTW* 890.11b–16b (9300–9302); *JJL* 7.5b–10a; and *TPGJ* 241.1859.
114. *STW* 1.14a.

115. For the descriptions of Xuanhua yuan and Wang Yan's decadent life, see *STW* 1.14a; *Qingyi lu*, 2.75a–b; *Maoting kehua*, 8.1a–2a; *ZZTJ* 270.8842, 271.8861; *WGS* 1.10b–11b; *JLQJZ* 6.7b; and *JJL* 7.2b–3a.
116. *STW* 1.23a.
117. *BMSY yuwen buyi*, 457 and *QTS* 889.10048.
118. *STW* 1.14b.
119. *STW* 1.13b and *ZZTJ* 270.8842.
120. *STW* 1.15b; *ZZTJ* 271.8874; and *JJL* 7.2b.
121. *STW* 1.13b.
122. *STW* 1.15b and *ZZTJ* 271.8874.
123. *XWDS* 63.791 and *ZZTJ* 270.8843.
124. *JJL* 1.1a–1b; *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 136.980; *Maoting kehua*, 8.1b–2a; and *Qingxiang zaji*, 7.2b.
125. *STW* 1.15b and *JJL* 7.1a–2b.
126. *STW* 1.15a.
127. *Ibid.*, 1.15b.
128. *QTW* 890.11a (9300).
129. *ZZTJ* 272.8892.
130. *STW* 1.16b.
131. *STW*, 1.14a–b; *XWDS* 63.791–792; *ZZTJ* 272.8892; *WGS* 1.12a–b; and *JGZ* 6.3a–b.
132. *ZZTJ* 273.8925.
133. *STW* 1.16b.
134. *ZZTJ* 272.8892.
135. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 126.895.
136. For the pacification of Wang Zonglang's revolt, see *ZZTJ* 271.8852–8853 and *SGCQ* 37.534; for the peasant rebellion led by Li Maozhang 李茂章, see *JGZ* 6.3b.
137. *ZZTJ* 273.8916 and *SGCQ* 43.638.
138. *ZZTJ* 269.8799–8815, 270.8817–8852; *XWDS* 5.42–44; and *JWDS* 28.389–393, 29.395–408. For a narrative history of the war between the Jin and the Liang during this period, see also Tao Maobing, *Wudai shilue*, 61–68; Davis, chaps. 2–3 in *Emperor and Bard*.
139. *ZZTJ* 271.8862.
140. For the establishment of the Later Tang and its conquest of the Liang, see *ZZTJ* 272.8881–8901; *XWDS* 5.44–5; and Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 3, 1–25.
141. *XWDS* 40.432–433, 69.856–857; and Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 3, 49–51.

142. ZZTJ 272.8903. Based on XWDS (47.523) and JWDS (90.1187), the Tang envoy at this time should be Yang Yanxun 楊彥詢.
143. JWDS 136.1820, 31.426 and CFYG 232.19a (2764).
144. The Shu envoys' words at the Tang court are quoted in Zhuangzong's "Fa Shu zhao" 伐蜀詔, in JWDS 33.456 (使來而尚抗書題, 情動而先誇險固); see also QTW 103.9b (1054).
145. For the responses of the Wu and Southern Han at this time, see ZZTJ 272.8903; JWDS 30.421, 135.1808; and XWDS 65.812. For a survey about the relations of the Later Tang and other regimes, see Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 3, 47–54.
146. JWDS 136.1820.
147. ZZTJ 272.8907.
148. Li's biography in JWDS 70.929–931 and XWDS 26.283–285. Note that sources vary greatly about the date of Li Yan's diplomatic mission. XWDS mentions Li Yan's mission twice, one in the sixth year of Qiande (924), the other in the third year of Tongguang (925). See XWDS 63.792–793 and 26.283, respectively. JWDS (33.454) only records the return date of Li Yan, the eighth month of 925. Both STW (1.18b) and JLQJZ (6.7b) record his mission in 925, but another Shu source, JIL (1.2a), gives "the early Tongguang" (*Tongguang chu* 同光初) as the time when Li Yan came. ZZTJ (273.8918, 8921) says Li Yan went to Shu in the fourth month of 924 and returned about a month later. According to the TJKY (ZZTJ 273.8921), the records about the date of Li Yan's mission also vary greatly among the sources that are not extant today, such as *Shu shu* 蜀書 and Zhuangzong's *Shilu*. In any case, it is reasonable to believe that Li Yan was sent to Shu by Zhuangzong more than once. Such a view is held by Wang Wencai whose study my account here is based on. See Wang and Wang, *Shu taowu jiaojian*, 192–193, 204–205.
149. STW 1.18b–19b; JLQJZ 6.7b–8b; JIL 1.3a–4a.
150. ZZTJ 273.8918.
151. JIL 1.2a.
152. *Rulin gongyi*, 70a; XWDS 63.793; and WGGs 1.12a.
153. JWDS 136.1820 and ZZTJ 273.8921.
154. JWDS 33.454. The same account is also found in ZZTJ 273.8920; XWDS 26.284; and JWDS 136.1820. Note that STW (1.17a) attributes the mission to another Tang envoy, Li Yanchou, who arrived in Chengdu in the ninth month of 924, half of a year earlier than Li Yan. The term "cao," quoted earlier, obviously referred to "caoshi 草市" (local markets). For a study of *caoshi* during the Five Dynasties, see Wen, "Wudai shiguo shiqi caoshizhen fazhan yanjiu" and Hino, *Tōdai teiten no kinkyū*, 362–374.

155. *ZZTJ* 273.8918 and *JWDS* 136.1820.
156. *ZZTJ* 273.8918, 8924–8925.
157. *JWDS* 32.438 and *CFYG* 233.13b (2775). Ouyang’s mission that summer is also recorded in Zhuangzong’s *Shilu*, which states that the Shu letter was written in a diplomatic protocol for equal, rival states (*diguó lì*). See *TJKY*, in *ZZTJ* 273.8921, 8926–8927.
158. *ZZTJ* 273.8924 and *STW* 1.17a.
159. This visit is clearly recorded by the lost *Shu shu*, on which the account of *ZZTJ* (273.8921) is based. Although *JLQJZ* (6.7b) also mentions that Ouyang Bin was sent to Luoyang “this year” (*shì suì* 是歲), it does not provide an accurate date for that. Again, Ouyang Bin, just like Li Yan, must have made diplomatic journeys between Shu and Tang more than once.
160. Pu Yuqing, “Jian Shu Houzhu dongxun biao,” in *QTW* 890.13b (9301) and *JJL* 7.7a; *TPGJ* 241.1860.
161. *ZZTJ* 273.8927–8928.
162. *STW* 1.18b and *XWDS* 26.283. This mission might be the one mentioned in *JLQJZ* (6.7b), which mistakenly gives 926 (the first year of Xiankang 咸康) as the date. The Annals of Zhuangzong in *JWDS* (33.454) claim that Li Yan returned in the eighth month of 925, the same date mentioned by *Shilu* (quoted in *TJKY*, see *ZZTJ* 273.8921). If Li Yan visited Shu either in the fourth month of 924, as *ZZTJ* states, following the lost *Shu shu*, or in the tenth month, as the *Shilu* says, it is hard to explain why he stayed in Shu such a long time. Thus it is more reasonable to believe that Li Yan was sent to Shu twice, once in 924, again in 925. Unfortunately, all the sources except for *XWDS* only record one of the visits.
163. *JWDS* 136.1820, 70.929–930. For the meeting, see also *XWDS* 26.283–284. *STW* (1.19b) attributes the organization of the banquet to Song Guangbao, who must also have attended the meeting. For Zhuangzong’s reference to this debate in his “Fa Shu zhao,” see *JWDS* 33.456 and *QTW* 103.9b (1054).
164. *STW* 1.17a–b; *JJL* 7.1a–1b; and *SGCQ* 43.636.
165. *STW* 1.20a–b; *ZZTJ* 273.8936; and *XWDS* 63.793.
166. *ZZTJ* 273.8937–8938 and *JWDS* 33.455–458.
167. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 241.1858 and *QTW* 129.12b–13a (1293). For Wang Chengxiu and this journey, see also *STW* 1.21a; *XWDS* 63.793; and *ZZTJ* 273.8928, 8937–8938.
168. *ZZTJ* 273.8938; see also *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 241.1862.
169. *Wangshi jianwen lu*, quoted in *TPGJ* 241.1863.

170. For a detailed narrative of the campaign of conquest, see *CFYG* 20.11b–12a (217), 291.17b–18a (3432), 427.13a–16a (5088–9) and Davis, *Emperor and Bard*, chap. 4, 17–38.
171. *XWDS* 63.793; *ZZTJ* 273.8942, 274.8944; *STW* 1.21b; and *JLQJZ* 6.10a–b.
172. *CFYG* 123.10b–12a (1473–1474); *JWDS* 33.455–7; and *QTW* 103.8b–10b.
173. *CFYG* 416.30a–32a (4936–4937).
174. *JWDS* 33.459.
175. *JLQJZ* 6.10b–11a.
176. *JWDS* 33.460, 136.1820 and *STW* 1.21b; a complete letter is found in *QTW* 129.13b–14a (1293–4).
177. *JWDS* 136.1820–1821; *STW* 1.22a; *CFYG* 427.13b–14a (5088); and *QTW* 890.7b–8a (9298).
178. *ZZTJ* 274.8946; *STW* 1.22a; *XWDS* 63.793; and *JLQJZ* 6.10a–b.
179. Namely, from the eighteenth day of the ninth month (Oct. 8) of 925, when the Tang army left Luoyang, to the twenty-eighth day of the eleventh month (Dec. 16) when Tang troops entered Chengdu. See *ZZTJ* 274.8946. Note that *JWDS* (33.460, 136.1821) provides the same dates as those recorded in *ZZTJ*, but mistakenly counts seventy-five days.
180. *XWDS* 63.793; *ZZTJ* 274.8951; and *STW* 1.22b.
181. *JLQJZ* 6.9a–b; *QTW* 891. 3a–4b (9304).
182. *STW* 1.22b; *XWDS* 63.793; *ZZTJ* 274.8970–8971; and *JLQJZ* 6.12b.

CONCLUSION

1. *QTS* 761.8642.
2. *STW* 2.2b.
3. For Meng Zhixiang's successes, see *STW* 2.1a–3b; *XWDS* 64.797–803; *JWDS* 136.1822–1823; Yang, *Qian Shu Hou Shu shi*, 105–136; Amthor, *Meng Chih-hsiang (874-935)*; and Clark, "The Southern Kingdoms," 164–165.
4. *JWDS* 46.637–8; *CFYG* 233.14a (2775); and *STW* 2.3a.
5. Verellen, "Liturgy and Sovereignty," 59.
6. For social and economic development in the south during the Tang–Song transition, see Zheng, *Zhongguo gudai jingji zhongxin nanyi he Tang Song Jiangnan jingji yanjiu*, esp. 201–377; Shiba, "Urbanization and the Development of Markets in the Lower Yangzi Valley"; Hartwell, "Demographic, Political and Social Transformation of China, 750–1550"; Gu,

Zouxiang nanfang, 7–43, 119–189, 233–253; Clark, “The Southern Kingdoms,” 171–188; Clark, and *Portrait of a Community*.

7. *STW* 2.4b.
8. For the Later Shu’s relations with the northern dynasties, see Zou and Hu, “Qian Shu Hou Shu yu zhongyuan zhengquan de guanxi.” See also Tao, *Wudai shilue*, 289–293. Its doom is discussed in detail in Lorge, “From Warlord to Emperor.”
9. For Song-Liao relations, see Tao, *Two Sons of Heaven*; Tao, “Barbarians or Northerners: Northern Sung Images of the Khitans”; Wang, “The Rhetoric of a Lesser Empire”; Wright, *From War to Diplomatic Partity in Eleventh-Century China*; and Tsang, “War and Peace in Northern Sung China: Violence and Strategy in Flux, 960–1104 A.D.”

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ABBREVIATIONS USED

- BBCSJC* *Baibu congshu jicheng* 百部叢書集成. Taibei: Yiwen yinshuguan, 1964–1970.
- CSJCXB* *Congshu jicheng xinbian* 叢書集成新編. Taibei: Xinwenfeng chubanshe, 1985.
- QSBJ* *Quan Song biji* 全宋筆記. Edited by Shanghai shifan daxue gujizhengli yanjiusuo 上海師範大學古籍整理研究所. Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe, 2003 and 2006.
- SBBY* *Sibu beiyao* 四部備要. Taibei: Zhonghua shuju, 1965.
- SBCK* *Sibu congkan chubian suobianben* 四部叢刊初編縮編本. Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1965.
- GXJBCS* *Guoxue jiben congshu sibaizhong* 國學基本叢書四百種. Edited by Wang Yunwu 王雲五. Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1968.
- SKQS* *Yingyin Wenyuange Siku quanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書. Taibei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1986.

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